



AN AFRICAN ART
OF HORROR
THE BIZARRE WORLD OF
GHANAIAN FILM POSTERS

CASKET CASES PHANTOM FOOTSTEPS AND HAUNTED COFFINS

SAUCER SCIENCE IS THE US GOVERNMENT EXPLORING ALIEN TECH?

TERROR IN THE URALS THE DYATLOV PASS INCIDENT REVISITED

GIANT ICE DISCS • GHOSTLY DIVORCE • INDIAN CHUPACABRAS • RISE OF THE ANTI-VAXXERS

THE WORLD OF

STRANGE PHENOMENA

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NEWS

ForteanTimes

FT377 MARCH 2019 £4.50

The Beast of Gévaudan



THE BLOODTHIRSTY MONSTER THAT
TERRORISED 18TH CENTURY FRANCE

ALIEN PROBE IN
EARTH ORBIT?

THE MYSTERY OF
THE BLACK KNIGHT
SATELLITE

SPEAKING IN
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AN OUTBREAK OF
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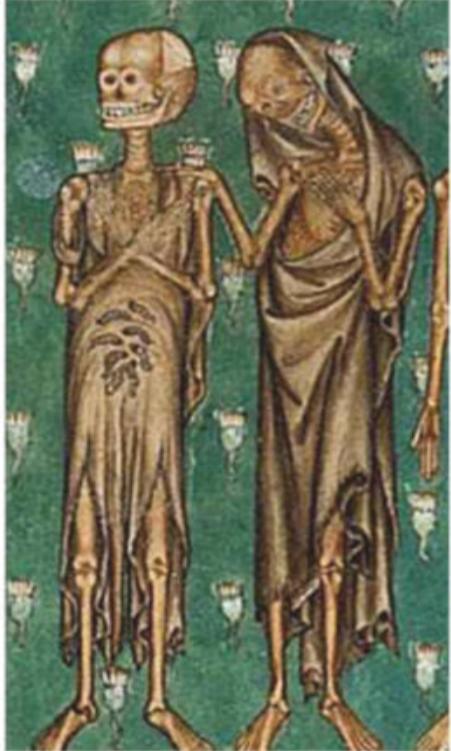
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FORTEAN TIMES 377

Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: The Dyatlov Pass revisited, doorbell licker, ghostly divorce, flying monkeys...

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EDITORIAL



HARDHATS AND LOO PAPER

FT MEDIA ALERT

In recent months, mentions of *FT* have cropped up in a couple of unexpected places. Firstly, novelist and historian Robert Irwin penned a nice appreciation in the pages of the *Times Literary Supplement* (26 Oct 2018). Providing some brief background on Charles Fort for those who've never come across him, Irwin sketches the "surprisingly respectable literary ancestry" of the "Fortean movement" and drops some names that are probably more familiar to *TLS* readers – Theodore Dreiser, Ben Hecht, John Cowper Powys, Sherwood Anderson – all of whom were early supporters. Irwin rightly identifies one of *FT*'s main strengths as being "its actively engaged readership: fans send in reports and write letters on such matters as a robin landing on one's head considered as a death omen; Cyrano de Bergerac's scepticism regarding witchcraft; robots as aids to geriatric care; and Mothman".

While approving of the breadth of content in the magazine, Irwin wonders whether Fort himself would approve of our "hardhat" approach to reports of strange phenomena both historical (the 'Salzburg Cube') and contemporary (UFO sightings): Fort, Irwin argues, "was not interested in explanations", whereas for *FT*, "if a phenomenon can be explained scientifically, then it has been explained satisfactorily".

While we hope we have not succumbed to the sort of scientism that so exercised Fort, in the Internet age – when purveyors of what 'skeptics' like to call 'woo' can generate more media interest than scientific experts – we do try and maintain level heads when looking at reports of anomalies; is this the same thing as wearing hardhats? We'd be interested to hear whether we get the balance between open-minded interest and dispassionate analysis right; or are we too sceptical these days?

Mike Prentiss of Nottingham certainly thinks so, as he often writes to tell us. As he put it in one treasured letter from a few years back: "Some wag brings a copy

of your ignorant magazine into my pub every month. I cut it up and present it as alternative toilet paper for my older customers who have nostalgic yearnings for slippery Izal-like loo paper... I have a brilliant idea for a cartoon in your sceptical, derisive comic. An ostrich buries its head in the desert sand while nearby a UFO has landed. The caption: UFOs? IMPOSSIBLE! I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE."

Meanwhile, the Channel 4 reality TV series *Gogglebox* (in which we watch people watching telly) also threw up an unexpected *FT* reference. In the episode broadcast on 14 December 2018, the charmingly eccentric Giles and Mary from Wiltshire were very surprised when the small table between their chairs appeared to start moving of its own accord. "That's the most extraordinary thing ever!" proclaimed Giles, before Mary realised that their dog had become

wedged between the table legs, causing the seemingly paranormal phenomenon. Giles suggested that it should be reported on *News at 10*, but quick as a flash Mary suggested they should send the story to *Fordeant Times*! Are they subscribers, we wonder... (Thanks to Rob Gandy for alerting us to this.)



ERRATA

FT376:9: A story in the Sidelines section appeared without the cartoon by Martin Ross that was supposed to illustrate it. So, here it is again, with Martin's too-good-to-waste drawing reproduced above.

MARIACHEAT

A mariachi singer hired by a man in Mexico City to croon to his lover beneath her balcony was furious to find the woman was his own wife. The music ended as the pair traded blows. The man had planned to propose to the cheating woman after the rendition of "If They Let Us". *D.Mirror*, 21 Sept 2018.

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING



Parapsychology: Exploring the science of the paranormal

10th – 12th May 2019, University of Warwick

The conference will put research described as 'paranormal' under the microscope of critical scrutiny. Phenomena to be discussed include near-death experiences, poltergeists and the veracity of readings by mediums. We have as speakers some very well-informed believers in the existence of the paranormal, together with some equally sharp sceptics:

David Luke (University of Greenwich; author of *Other Worlds: Psychedelics and Exceptional Human Experience*)

'*Psychedelics, psi and other exceptional human experiences*'

Peter Naish (University of Sussex and The Open University)

'*Things that go bump in the night: Revisiting old haunts*'

Tricia Robertson (University of Glasgow; author of *Things you can do when you are Dead*)

'*Psychical Research....The Cinderella Science*'

Pim van Lommel (Cardiologist, Arnhem, The Netherlands; author of *Consciousness beyond Life*)

'*Nonlocal Consciousness: A concept based on scientific studies on the Near-Death Experience*'

Callum Cooper (University of Northampton; author of *Telephone Calls from the Dead*)

'*After-Death Communications: Bridging Thanatology and Parapsychology*'

Chris Roe (University of Northampton, Director of the Centre for the Study of Anomalous Processes)

'*Psi as unconscious: Recent developments in experimental parapsychology*'

Frederick Toates (The Open University)

'*What is 'para' about parapsychology? Brains, Minds and Consciousness*'

Madeleine Castro (Leeds Beckett University)

'*Exploring the implications of a survey of reported paranormal experiences*'

Bernard Carr (Queen Mary University of London; former President of the Society for Psychical Research, Emeritus Professor of Mathematics & Astronomy)

'*Dreaming up a theory of psi*'



A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

THE DYATLOV PASS REVISITED

Russia launches new investigation into strange events of February 1959



DONAT SOROKIN \ TASS VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: The skiers' tent as it was discovered on 26 February 1959. ABOVE RIGHT: A Russian prosecutor holds up a file at a 4 February 2019 press conference in Ekaterinburg on the re-investigation of the Dyatlov Pass Incident.

A year ago, on 11 February 2018, a 49-year-old Russian tourist set out for the Dyatlov Pass in the Northern Urals, and three weeks later his wife reported him missing. The absence of any follow-up report suggests he has yet to be found. *tass.com*, 28 Feb 2018.

It's now 60 years since the death of nine Russian cross-country skiers on 1/2 February 1959 – an incident known to history as the Dyatlov Pass Incident, one of the great mysteries of the 20th century. A report on the incident by two journalists from the *Moscow Times* was our cover feature a decade ago [FT245:30-35]. In 1959, Khrushchev's government offered the non-explanation of "an unknown elemental force that [the skiers] were unable to overcome", and banned all travel to the region for three years. The files on the case were classified until the 1990s. Anatoly Guschin, one of the first people to study the original

files, said that a number of pages were mysteriously missing. In February this year, Alexander Korennoy, a spokesman for the Russian prosecutor-general's office, announced the launch of a new investigation.

What is known of that fateful night is that nine students, all but one from the Ural Polytechnic Institute in Sverdlovsk (now called Ekaterinburg), had made camp on the slopes of Kholat Syakhl Mountain, which rises 3,540ft (1,079m). Their final destination was Otorden Mountain, six miles (10km) further north. When the group – led by Igor Dyatlov, 23 – failed to return on 20 February, a rescue party was sent out and discovered the abandoned camp on 26 February.

The collapsed tent was half torn down, covered with snow, and filled with all the group's belongings and footwear. It had been cut open from the inside. Snowprints led downhill towards a forest 1.5km away. The bodies

of Georgy Krivonischenko and Yury Doroshenko were discovered on the edge of the forest, barefoot and in their underclothes, near the charred remains of a fire. Their hands were burned. At the time of their death the temperature was well below minus 20°C. About 300m (1,000ft) away lay the body of Dyatlov, one hand clutching a branch. Between him and the tent lay the bodies of Rustem Slobodin and Zina Kolmogorova; both looked as if they had been trying to crawl back to the tent. All five had died of hypothermia; Slobodin's skull was fractured, but this was not considered the cause of death. Two months later, the remaining four skiers were found buried under 4.6m (15ft) of snow in a forest ravine. Nicolas Thibault-Brignolle's skull had been crushed. Ludmila Dubinina and Alexander Zolotaryov had numerous broken ribs. Dubinina's tongue was missing. No mention of injuries to Alexander Kolevatov.

The bodies showed no external wounds. The injuries resembled those sustained by car crash victims, or suggested that they had been hugged to death. Very high levels of radiation were found on the bodies and clothes of four of the skiers, and witnesses at the funeral reported that their skin was a nut brown or orange, as if suntanned. A group of geography students, who had been camping about 30 miles (50km) south of Igor Dyatlov's group, had seen strange orange spheres or "balls of fire" floating in the night sky in the direction of Kholat Syakhl Mountain on the night the students died.

There are allegedly 75 different theories about what caused the deaths. Donnie Eichar, author of *Dead Mountain* (2014), suggested that "infrasound" caused by howling winds caused a panic in the group, forcing them to flee. Or had they dug their way out of an avalanche and succumbed to hypothermia-induced madness? Had they inadvertently entered a military testing ground and been eliminated? Had they been killed by a Russian yeti or almasty? Or by murderous aliens? Or by the local indigenous people, the Mansi? Ominously, in the Mansi language, Oterten means "Don't go there" and Kholat Syakhl means "Mountain of the dead". However, the Mansi go nowhere near these mountains in winter, the weather being unsuitable for deer hunting or fishing. Besides, no footprints, apart from those of the dead skiers, were found around the tent or near the bodies. Since the area where the group set up their last camp has been officially named "Dyatlov's Pass" in memory of Igor Dyatlov, the mystery is unlikely to pass into oblivion. *Times*, 4 Feb; *dailymail.co.uk*, 7 Feb 2019.



INDIAN GOATSUCKER

A chupacabras panic on the subcontinent

PAGE 9



DOORBELL LICKER

The wandering tongue of Roberto Arroyo

PAGE 10



STONE AGE SURPRISE

New theories about very old artworks

PAGE 24

THE CONSPIRASPHERE



Are conspiracy theories really the same thing as fake news? NOEL ROONEY questions the normals' bundling of non-mainstream thought into one homogenous easy target...

CLUMPS

A recent article in the *Guardian*, looking at the victims of online vitriol, some of it connected to conspiracy theories, made a passing comment that caught my attention. Talking about the weaponisation of conspiracy theory, the author says: "Together with their first cousins, fake news, they [conspiracy theories] are challenging society's trust in facts." There is truth in that statement, of course, but there is also a loose bundling of conspiracy theory with fake news that, I think, deserves a little scrutiny.

That bundling technique has appeared elsewhere in treatments of conspiracy theory: in a study conducted by researchers at Fribourg University, it was found that creationists tend to believe conspiracy theories. The reasons proposed for this correspondence of beliefs were twofold: first, that both creationists and conspiracy theorists tend to employ teleological rather than causative thinking; and second, that both groups tend to be less well educated than their non-believing peers. Education is a normative process that tends to imbue its recipients with mainstream beliefs, so we can safely assume the second finding amounts to little more than sticking one's tongue out and saying: "You don't have to be stupid to believe these things, but..."

There are without doubts points of similarity and contact between conspiracy theory and fake news, and between creationists and conspiracy theorists; but conspiracy theory and fake news are definitely not the same thing, and not all creationists are conspiracy theorists, or vice versa. The first conflation is an example of lazy thinking; the second stems from a belief system, equally as rigid as any creationist standpoint, that the people who challenge or reject mainstream values and beliefs form one group – the 'them' from whom 'we' are to be protected. The effect of these two different but related strategies (I here propose that people who think creationists

and conspiracy theorists are the same, and conspiracy theory and fake news are the same, tend to belong to the same mainstream belief systems) is similar if not identical. It bundles the whole gamut of marginal thinking into one, easily digestible clump, and relieves us of the burden of paying particular attention to the breadth of the spectrum of alternative beliefs, and the variety of ways in which people attach themselves to thinking against the societal grain. At root, this is essentialist thinking. It allows us to form a homogenous group of all the people whose beliefs we do not share and characterise them in broad, prejudicial terms. This is not an acceptable practice when those on the margins engage in it; and nor should it be acceptable for the bastions of normative culture.

I can't leave without at least mentioning the recent arrest of Roger Stone, on a spicy variety of charges including lying to Congress and witness tampering. Stone, who famously has a tattoo of Richard Nixon on his back, and who clearly knew the feds were after him, spent the couple of days prior to his arrest spreading a delicious conspiracy theory suggesting that the Democrats were planning a coup d'état aimed at removing the Donald and Mike Pence, and replacing them with politically resurrected Democrat leader of the house Nancy Pelosi, who would, he affirmed, immediately resign and make way for Hillary Clinton to become president.

Claiming a conspiracy just as you are being person-handled into the backseat of a paddy wagon is not a tactic original to Stone, of course; his erstwhile employer and current body adornment was prone to similar gambits. I think Stone would probably have to hold his hands up to this; in which case, the Tricky Dicky tatt on his back would likely fold its features into a crooked smile.

Guardian, 24 Jan 2019: <https://bit.ly/2tdXM4Z>; www.livescience.com/63388-conspiracies-creationism-share-teleological-thinking.html

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

DESPITE DANGER SIGNS, UNICORNS ARE UPBEAT

New York Times, 22 Feb 2016.

Deadly octopus found in tennis ball

ABC News, – Apr 2016.

GOATS RUN AMOK IN SCHOOL

Brighton Argus, 14 June 2018.

Smiling at livestock makes meat taste better, farmers told

Irish Independent, 30 Aug 2018.

PARROTS 'HAVE SHREWD BUSINESS SENSE'

<i> 23 Aug 2018.

Crayfish tears off own claw to escape hot soup

<i> 4 June 2018.



WINTER WONDERS

ICE DISCS

In mid-January, a massive disc of ice formed in the Presumpscot River in Westbrook, Maine. The disc, roughly 300ft (91m) in diameter, was slowly rotating counter-clockwise, with birds using it as a resting area. The location was dubbed "Moon River" because of its resemblance to the pale lunar orb. By general agreement, it was the most exciting thing that had happened in Westbrook since a giant snake was spotted eating a beaver in 2016. Such discs occur at river bends where the accelerating water creates a force called 'rotational shear', which breaks off a chunk of ice and twists it around. As the disc rotates, it grinds against surrounding ice, smoothing into a perfect circle. *CBS Local, 15 Jan; BBC News, 16 Jan; Times, D.Express, 17 Jan; chroniclelive.co.uk, 31 Jan 2019. SHAWN P OUELLETTE/PORTLAND PRESS HERALD VIA GETTY IMAGES*

ICE PANCAKES

On 4 January, rare ice 'pancakes' were seen on the River Dee near Braemar in Aberdeenshire, where temperatures had dropped to minus 10.5C (13F) in the two preceding days. More ice pancakes were seen on the River Swale in Richmond, North Yorkshire, at the end of January. Not a common sight in the UK, such slowly rotating ice discs, looking like frozen lily pads, are most frequently found in the Baltic, the US and Canada, as well as around Antarctica. *BBC News, 4 Jan 2019. PHOTO: JAMIE URQUHART/RIVER DEE TRUST*

SNOW ROLLERS

On 2 February, six snow rollers were spotted by Wiltshire forestry worker Brian Bayliss in one of his fields. "Conditions have to be just right for snow rollers to occur: a smooth, un-vegetated hillside, such as in this case near Marlborough, enhances the chance of them being formed," said BBC weatherman Ian Fergusson. "A layer of thin snow, settled atop existing ice and not sticking to it, combined with specific temperature, moisture level and wind speed, are fundamental to the creation of these natural oddities." If the wind is too strong, or too weak, or the snow is too tightly packed, snow rollers will not form. The resulting snowballs look like a hay bale, a doughnut or a Swiss roll, and can be hollow inside. For earlier snow rollers,

see **FT231:11** (2007) and **FT260:7** (2010). *BBC News, 3 Feb 2019. PHOTO: BRIAN BAYLISS/SWNS*.

AND ON MARS

The Korolev crater in the northern lowlands of Mars is filled with ice all year round owing to a trapped layer of cold Martian air that keeps the water frozen. The crater is 50 miles (80km) in diameter and contains 2,000 cu km of water ice, and in the centre of the crater the ice forms a mound more than a mile thick. Spacecraft, rovers and landers have revealed evidence of ancient watercourses and lake beds, with vast quantities of frozen water at the poles. *Guardian, 22 Dec 2018. PHOTO: ESA/DLR/FU BERLIN*







STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

BEAN A LONG WAY

A sea heart bean that probably fell from a monkey ladder vine in the Brazilian rainforest and rolled into a tributary of the Amazon washed up 5,000 (8,500km) miles away at Lulworth Cove in Dorset, where it was found by Jim Gale, 31. The bean looks like a big heart-shaped conker and is often used to make lockets. *Times, Sun, 14 Dec 2018.*

BOOK WRAP BLUNDER

Martin Dorey is furious that his book *No More Plastic* (on how to reduce plastic waste) was shrink-wrapped by a US distributor. The book's publisher Penguin was equally put out. Mr Dorey launched the Two-Minute Beach Clean campaign in 2009 to encourage people to pick up marine litter. "We're sleepwalking into oblivion with plastic," he said. *D.Telegraph, D.Express, 3 Dec 2018.*

XMAS BLAZE

Nicola Jackson, 33, managed to flee her house in Swansea with her two young daughters when their decorated Christmas tree burst into flames. She then rescued her husband, who was asleep on the sofa. It was thought the family would be unable to move back into the smoke-damaged building for several weeks. *Sun, 6 Dec 2018.*

BAD DOG

On 7 October, an English bulldog bit the genitals clean off a 22-year-old man during a party in Haddington, East Lothian, on Scotland's east coast. The wedding tackle may have been eaten by the dog, which was covered in the victim's blood. The unnamed man was put into an induced coma in Edinburgh. *thetimes.co.uk, 11 Oct 2018.*



MARTIN ROSS

FAKE NEWS |

Newly discovered Scottish stone circle is, er, new, and Civil Service advises shooting rabid children



ABOVE: The recumbent stone circle: "not ancient". BELOW: Scarfolk Council's rabies poster, reprinted in a Civil Service magazine.

GALLING STONES

In December, archaeologists announced the discovery of an "amazing" recumbent stone circle in the parish of Leochel-Cushnie, Aberdeenshire. Since Paul Devereux's report (FT376:14), a farmer who had once owned the land has confessed to building the circle himself about 25 years ago. "These types of monuments are notoriously difficult to date," said Neil Ackerman, the historic environment record assistant at Aberdeenshire council. He said the revelation was "disappointing", but doggedly looked on the bright side: "That it so closely copies a regional monument type shows the local knowledge, appreciation and engagement with the archaeology of the region by the local community. I hope the stones continue to be used and enjoyed – while not ancient, [the circle] is still in a fantastic location and makes for a great feature in the landscape." There's no further mention of "the rich lichen cover... indicative of the ring's antiquity". *BBC News, 21 Jan; D.Telegraph, 22 Jan 2019.*

BALLARDIAN GAFFE

The *Civil Service Quarterly* is produced by the Cabinet Office

and is sent out to Government offices and departments around the country. In the July 2018 issue, alongside Government posters from the last 100 years – including the "Careless talk costs lives" campaign from World War II – was one on page 20 in 1970s style that read: "If you suspect your child has RABIES don't hesitate SHOOT It could save a life..." Shome mishtake, surely...

It was in fact a parody poster produced by the council of Scarfolk. The fictional town of Scarfolk was created by Richard Little as "a dystopian satire of the 1970s that somehow leaks into and reflects on current affairs" (see FT354:30-37). It has developed a cult following for its Ballardian exploration of the 1970s, and a suburbanised idea of totalitarianism, pagan ritual, and Scarfolk Council's comical obsession with keeping rabies at bay. Despite being ostensibly in North West England (circa 1979), Scarfolk is primarily an online creation – although as its cult following grows it is increasingly featuring in other media. A Cabinet Office spokesman said the poster "was mistakenly used

for illustrative purposes". It was removed from the online version of the magazine. *news.sky.com, 20 July; Sunday Telegraph, 22 July 2018.*

The Gang of Fort is reminded of a verse from the "Psycho-Babycraft" chapter in Sellar & Yeatman's 1932 sequel to *1066 And All That*, entitled *And Now All This:*

"PSYCHO-LULLABYE

Hushabye Babies

(*Hush quite a lot*)—

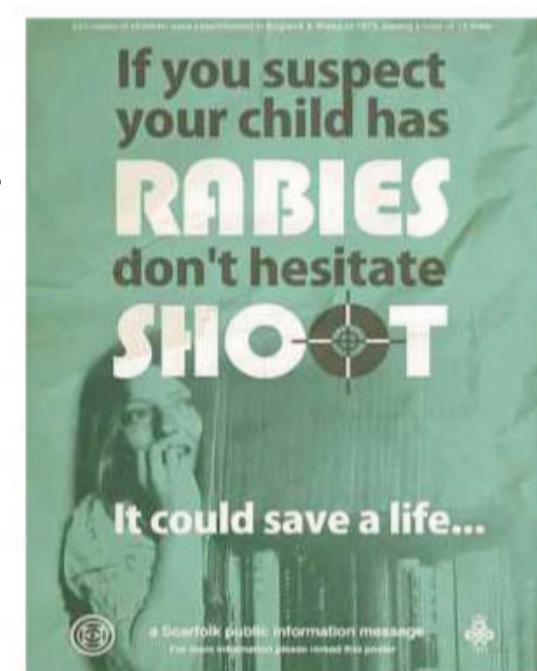
Bad Babies get Rabies

(And have to be shot).

So suck the right fingers,

And dream the right dreams,

(*And don't you wake up with Psymbolical Pscreams!*)



RICHARD LITTLE



NIGHT TERRORS

Strange creatures on the Kentucky back-roads and an Indian chupacabras panic



ABOVE: A stretch of road outside Sandy Hook, Kentucky. BELOW: A fanciful 'photo' appeared online claiming to show the Indian blood sucker as a Pan-like monster.

WALKING TREES

A woman reported seeing a frightening "creature" on a road outside the town of Sandy Hook, about 100 miles (160km) east of Lexington, Kentucky. She was a passenger in her husband's car, about 7:45pm on 18 October. "At some point, I started screaming... 'There is something in the road!'" she said. "I'm looking at this thing which is... at least 7ft [2m] tall. It was the colour of a tree... It turned its head and looked straight at our car."

The husband saw only "a strange shadow, but not the creature," said Jack Smarr, an investigator with the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization (founded 1995), which claims to be the oldest and largest "scientific research organisation exploring the bigfoot/sasquatch mystery". According to Smarr, "The entire episode lasted only three to five seconds," and the animal was nearly 100 feet (30m) away. He called it "a Class B incident" in which a "possible sasquatch was observed at a great distance or in poor lighting." He seems to be clutching at straws – or twigs.

On Facebook Charles Eric Presnell of Burnsville, North

Carolina, said he, too, had seen a "being the same colour as a tree" in western North Carolina. He wrote that he was relieved to learn someone else has seen the same thing. "What I saw has a pattern and a colour scheme to its fur that, in my opinion, closely resembles what looks to be tree bark." *Charlotte (NC) Observer*, 27 Dec 2018.

INDIAN BLOOD SUCKER

Starting in late 2017, something has been attacking livestock throughout the eastern Indian state of Odisha (formerly Orissa). The creature (which some might see as an Indian chupacabras) seems to prefer to take the organs of the

unfortunate animals and leave the rest.

Last November a mysterious attack left 12 people injured in the neighbouring state of Maharashtra. The victims were all either sleeping or working in fields and none of them got a good glimpse of the animal. The only certainty is that it is large and hungry for blood – either animal or human.

In late November over 40 ducks were slaughtered in the northeastern state of Manipur. Their owner reported that internal organs were removed from each of the ducks and bite marks were visible. Strangest of all, no blood was found on the ground. Police found 3in (7.6cm) footprints at the scene.

According to the local *Nagaland Post*, this latest attack only heightened residents' fear of whatever has been terrorising communities and mutilating farm animals for over a year. Since 6 November, mysterious nocturnal killings of livestock with internal organs missing – particularly chickens, goats and pigs – had been reported from four districts of Manipur.

On 1 December a pregnant woman was allegedly attacked by a wild animal in Imphal East district, and hospitalised with scratch marks on her left hand. Wooden cages were set up at various locations in an attempt to snare the mystery predator. *easternmirrornagaland.com*, 29 Nov; *mysteriousuniverse.org*, 30 Nov; *Times of India*, *Indian Express*, 2 Dec 2018.



SIDELINES...

LION CUB FOUND

On 7 October, a jogger running through a field in Tienhoven, near Utrecht in central Netherlands, found a lion cub abandoned in a small dog crate. A vet said it appeared to be in good health and estimated it was about four months old. It was taken to the Hoenderdael Lion Foundation. *BBC News*, 7 Oct 2018.

SUN SETS OFF MINES

Research published in the journal *Space Weather* shows that a 1972 solar flare caused the mysterious detonation of dozens of US sea mines south of Hai Phong in northern Vietnam on 4 August, as well as widespread electric and communication-grid disturbances in North America. *Sky News*, 9 Nov 2018.

THE RIGHT MAN

A Canadian treasure hunter who died on 12 August aged 80 discovered two valuable shipwrecks – *Le Chameau* (sunk 1725) and *Feversham* (sunk 1711) – off the treacherous shores of Nova Scotia in 1965 and 1968. His name was Alex Storm. *D.Telegraph*, 4 Sept 2018.

PERILS OF DOG WALKING

On 28 August, a dog walker found his pet chewing a WWII hand grenade it had picked up in Plymouth. Ordnance Disposal carried out a controlled explosion. And on 30 October Debbie Bentley, 62, kicked a 'ball' partly buried in leaves in a wood in Watford, thinking her dog could play with it. When her husband picked it up, he realised it was a grenade. Ordnance Disposal dealt with the Mills bomb deployed in WWI trenches. *D.Telegraph*, 29 Aug + 5 Nov 2018.

JUST TOO POLITE

Simon Jones, 38, queued for 15 minutes in a Country Durham Natwest bank branch on a hot spring day, wearing a hoodie, latex gloves, facemask and shades, while carrying a bottle of Febreze and a holdall. Fearing he had a skin condition, the bank manager asked whether she could help him. "No," he said. Reaching the counter, he told the cashier he had acid and a bomb, before forcing her to place £370 in his bag. He was later caught and jailed for 40 months. *D.Mail*, 14 Dec 2018.



STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

LIGHT-PAWED CATS

On 16 September, a cat owner in St Pauls, Bristol, found their cat curled up asleep in its bed next to a bag containing 30 wraps of crack and heroin it had presumably found in the street. Another Bristol cat specialises in small coloured plastic balls; between 27 March and 20 April, eight-year-old Tigger brought 50 of them home to Graham Road. *Western Daily Press, 20 April, 18 Sept 2018.*

SEAL TREKS

On 11 December, a seal pup was found on a doorstep in Seaton Sluice, Northumberland, just yards from a busy road. It was returned to the sea, 300 yards away. Ten days later, another seal pup was found in Terrington St Clement, Norfolk, four miles (6.4km) from the sea, and was returned to the shore. In early January, a third was found in a garden in Kings Lynn, Norfolk, also four miles from the sea. *D.Telegraph, 13+23 Dec 2018; D.Express, 7 Jan 2019.*

FOWL DEEDS

Gangs of feral chickens – pets dumped in the wild after becoming too unruly – are making life a misery for residents of Jersey by chasing joggers, tearing up gardens and raising a racket at three in the morning. There are estimated to be six broods around the island – the largest numbering more than 100. As there are no foxes, the fowl have no natural predator. *D.Telegraph, Metro, 5 July 2018.*

LEFT SPELLBOUND

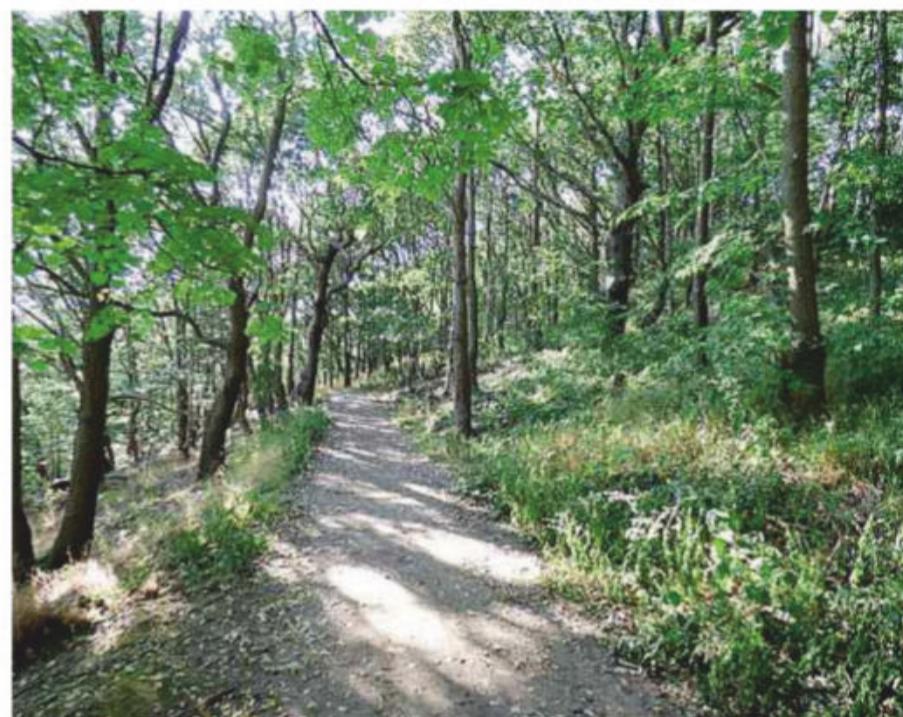
A village near Monmouth in South Wales is causing havoc for visitors because its name can be spelt at least 26 different ways. Is it Trelech, Trylec, Tryleg, Treleck, Trillet, Treleek, or Trylleck? The list goes on. There are even five common spellings in use on road signs and shops. Tryleg is thought to be Welsh for “conspicuous stone”. *D.Mail, 18 July 2018.*

LEATHER SNACK

An alligator that bit a man on the foot still had his shoe in its mouth when it was pulled out of a lake. The 10ft (3m) –long reptile attacked the 85-year-old at a retirement community in Lakeland, Florida. The victim was not seriously hurt. *Metro, 5 Dec 2018.*

NOWT SO QUEER

Devil doggers, doorbell licker, strange cure, ghost pirate divorce and more...



ABOVE: Hawksworth Wood near Leeds. BELOW: The strange behaviour of Roberto Arroyo, caught on CCTV. OPPOSITE: Amanda Teague's ghostly marriage is over.

YORKSHIRE HIGH JINKS

A dog walker has claimed she saw a couple smeared with bird blood having sex in the middle of a group of chanting women in woods at Kirkstall, Leeds, on 11 January. She was walking her dog near Hawksworth Wood Trail, just off Craigside Walk shortly after midday. West Yorkshire Police confirmed officers were called to “a report of public indecency” in the woods and they have now stepped up patrols in the area.

The unnamed witness said: “I let the dog off for a run and he went to the top of the wood, near a field where kids play and people walk. He disappeared and I heard what I thought was shouting so I went to get him, as he’s a big softy, but I thought he had scared someone. It sounded like someone shouting in a different language, but then I saw a lady in her late 30s lying on a white plastic sheet.” She said she thought the woman “was dead” at first, but when she went closer to try and find her dog, she saw a man. The man then used his finger to take blood from a dead bird and “put it on the woman’s face” before they had sex, she claimed.

She added: “I dragged the dog away and my friend and I walked away. Then, about 10 minutes later, I walked back

She saw a couple smeared in bird blood having sex in the woods

that way and my friend said she saw at least five other women clothed around [the couple] and we realised they were chanting. We decided to go and ring the police as it seemed odd, because they knew people were there and just carried on. We checked back later, to see if they’d gone and they were dressed in tunics and walking away as if nothing happened and had the sheet folded over their arms. It was completely bizarre.” *examinerlive.co.uk, 12 Jan 2019.*



CLICK MY BELL

Early on the morning of 5 January, CCTV in Salinas, California, caught Roberto Daniel Arroyo, 33, licking the Dungan family’s doorbell. The clear footage shows him leaning his head against the intercom outside their front door and licking the bell from several different angles. Here’s the kicker: he carried on licking for three hours! The Dungan parents were not at home at the time; their children were sleeping inside, but did not wake up. The family had installed the doorstep camera a month before and were alerted to movement at about 5am, when they reviewed the footage to find the disturbing images. They alerted police, who said the footage was so clear they quickly identified the man as Arroyo. They added that he appeared to “relieve himself” in the Dungans’ garden and entered several other neighbours’ yards. *gbinfo.uk, 9 Jan 2019.*

UNORTHODOX TREATMENT

A case study by doctors at Adelaide and Meath Hospital, Tallaght, published recently in the *Irish Medical Journal*, was entitled “Semeny Harmless Back Pain: An Unusual Presentation of a Subcutaneous Abscess”. Dr Lisa Dunne and her colleagues stated: “This is the first reported case of semen injection for use as a medical treatment.” Using a hypodermic needle purchased online, a 33-year-old man had injected his own semen intravenously as a



"cure" intended to treat his chronic back pain. It does not appear to have worked. After reportedly injecting semen into his arm every month for 18 months, he finally sought medical attention. He complained of "severe, sudden onset lower back pain," having lifted a "heavy steel object" three days beforehand. After a patch of red swelling was found on his right forearm, he admitted he'd been injecting himself with his own semen. This time around, he had injected three "doses" of semen, entering both his blood vessels and his muscles. The swollen region grew and hardened around the area on his arm where he'd injected, and an X-ray revealed an area of trapped air beneath his skin. The doctors immediately hospitalised the patient, treating him with an intravenous antimicrobial therapy. After the patient's back pain improved, he discharged himself.

Dr Dunne said there were no other reported cases of intravenous semen injection to be found anywhere in medical literature – although there was a report of the effects of subcutaneous semen injection into rats and rabbits. A search of Internet sites and forums found no other documentation of semen injection for back pain treatment or anything else. Attempts at intravenous and arterial injection of harmful substances such as mercury, petrol, charcoal lighter fluid, hydrochloric acid and hydrocarbon are well described and are generally carried out in attempted suicide. *Gizmodo*, 16 Jan; *Irish Independent*, 17 Jan 2019.

HOSTILE DIVORCE

You might recall the Irish Jack Sparrow impersonator from Drogheda, Co Louth, who married the ghost of an 18th century Haitian pirate back in 2016 – and again in 2017 (by a registrar in international



waters) [FT370:8]. She was called Amanda Teague in the news reports, having taken the surname of her deceased freebooting spouse, who had been hanged in 1753 – or so she said. She claimed to be the first person in the UK and Ireland to legally marry a ghost. "He is dark-skinned and has jet-black hair, so he tells me," she said. "I told him I wasn't really cool with having casual sex with a spirit and I wanted us to make a proper commitment to each other. I wanted the big traditional wedding with the white dress. It was very important to me." The mother-of-five, who was married previously, said she had never felt a connection to anyone like the one she had with the ghost, who was left at the altar in his earlier life.

Well, now the romance has soured and she's reverted to her maiden name, Amanda Large. Posting on social media the 46-year-old said: "So I feel it's time to let everyone know that my marriage is over. I will explain all in due course but for now all I want to say is be VERY careful when dabbling in

spirituality, it's not something to mess with..." *irishmirror.ie*, 8 Dec; *D.Mail (online)*, 10 Dec 2018. (The *Mail* ran the story under the splendid headline "We arrrrr getting divorced").

DESPERATE MEASURE

On 20 September, a man was discovered wandering around St Giles's Cathedral in Edinburgh with no identification and apparently with no clue who he was. Two weeks later, police identified him by his tattoos following an appeal. He was Salvatore Mannino, 52, from Lajatico, near Pisa in Italy. When his wife Francesca flew over to see him in hospital, he claimed not to know her.

Back in Italy, he claimed not to understand Italian, instead communicating in basic English. Eventually, however, the former supermarket manager and father of four admitted: "I did it to get away from my nagging mother-in-law. I never lost my memory. I wanted to show my family I was important to them. I wanted to regain my position as a husband and father as I felt my mother-in-law had taken that from me." Suspicions about Mannino's disappearance had been raised when Italian police found his computer, which contained searches for "how to disappear" and "how to fake memory loss". He was charged with abandonment.

"The waste of time and money hasn't gone down well," said a police spokesman. Sandra Bocelli, 75, the said mother-in-law, was naturally furious, and warned that he could be frozen out of the family. She had moved into her daughter's home five years ago to help with the children because Mr Mannino was "never there". *Metro*, 30 Oct; *Sun*, 30 Oct, 1 Nov; *D.Mail*, 2+3 Nov 2018.

SIDELINES...

VIRTUAL WEDDING

Last November, Akihiko Kondo, 35, married Hatsune Miku, a singing hologram that uses a voice synthesizer to perform in sold-out shows worldwide. Not one family member was among the 40 guests at the ceremony, which cost around £14,000. *huffingtonpost.com*, 14 Nov 2018.

FURTIVE FROG

A 40p bag of rocket salad, called "Nature's Pick", had a live frog nesting among its leaves. Bought at Aldi in Bedminster, Bristol, it had been in the fridge for two days when the amphibian was discovered. Joe Archer Joy released it in his garden. *Metro*, 24 Sept 2018.

OWL PHOBIA

In pain following an operation, Sally Brayshaw, 54, went to see locum GP Thomas O'Brien at Apsley Surgery in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, in 2012. The Pentecostal Christian told her she was possessed by demons and took her to numerous religious meetings over six months. She then developed a crippling fear of owls after hearing a preacher speak of sacrificing an owl. She has now won £12,700 damages in the High Court. O'Brien was struck off in 2015 and his whereabouts are unknown. *BBC News*, 30 Nov; *Sun*, 1 Dec 2018.

SKEWERED

Margaret Reynolds, 67, was impaled by the pole of a beach umbrella after it was blown across Seaside Heights, New Jersey, on 16 July. Firefighters used bolt cutters to cut the pole after it went straight through the Londoner's right ankle. On 22 July it happened again – in Ocean City, Maryland. A 46-year-old woman was impaled in the chest and paramedics had to cut off the end. *D.Mail*, 18 July; *D.Telegraph*, 24 July 2018.



MARTIN ROSS



STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

LATE EGG

The world's oldest known wild seabird has laid an egg at the age of 68. Wisdom, a Laysan albatross, and her mate return to the same site each year at the Midway Atoll national wildlife refuge, 1,300 miles (2,000km) northwest of Hawaii. Wisdom was banded in 1956 and has returned to Midway almost every year since 2002. The species lays one egg and raises one chick a year; biologists think Wisdom has raised 36. *Guardian*, 8 Dec 2018

FAT FIGHTER

The camu camu fruit from the Amazon rainforests of Brazil and Peru has 60 times more vitamin C than an orange and stops mice on a junk food diet from piling on weight. The fruit, a large berry that looks like an apple, boosts bacteria in the gut, destroys toxins that inflame the metabolic system, and improves glucose tolerance, reducing the risk of diabetes, heart disease and stroke. *Sun*, 1 Sept 2018.

SHC – OR WHAT?

An unnamed man's condition was critical in a Chelmsford burns unit after being found enveloped in flames outside the YMCA in Peterborough on 8 November. A passing driver used his coat to douse the flames. *Metro*, 9 Nov 2018.

WHAT A STAR!

As the late Montserrat Caballe performed at an open-air concert at Peralada castle in Catalonia, the lead violinist's score was blown across the stage in front of her. In full voice, without missing a note, the opera diva caught the score in mid-air, produced a pair of clothes pegs from her ample bosom, and clipped the score back on its stand. *D.Telegraph*, 11 Oct 2018.



MARTIN ROSS



GHANAIAN POSTERS ON DISPLAY

We've occasionally featured eye-popping African film posters in FT, but now over 100 fine Ghanaian examples from the collection of Karun Thakar and the late Mark Shivas are on free public display in London. These often bizarre creations were painted by local artists on sack or canvas so they could be rolled up, transported and displayed by the roadside by Ghana's itinerant film entrepreneurs as they

travelled the country. Blending elements of Hollywood and Bollywood with local beliefs, these sometimes six-foot-tall posters forged a unique visual identity for Ghana's film industry in the late 1980s.

African Gaze: Hollywood, Bollywood and Nollywood film posters from Ghana is at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS, University of London, Thornaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG until 23 Mar.

NO NEED TO SEARCH THE SKIES

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TO HOME



T-SHIRT



MUG



TEA TOWEL

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SEARCH MORETVICAR.COM FOR 'FORTEAN TIMES'



Saucer science from outer space

DAVID HAMBLING asks whether US state interest in UFOs was about leveraging alleged alien tech

The Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP) was a programme run by the US Defence Intelligence Agency from 2007-12 to tackle the potential threat posed by UFOs (see **FT362:2, 363:28**). Prompted by space entrepreneur and believer James Bigelow, the programme collated reports from the American military and others of what might plausibly be alien craft and recovered possible crash debris. But it also had a research side.

In response to a Freedom of Information Act request from the Federation of American Scientists, the DIA have now released a list of the 38 research projects that they funded to the tune of \$22m under AATIP. While the actual project reports haven't been released, their titles and the details of the researchers involved give us a good idea of the sort of questions being asked. And these in turn reveal the current best guesses about how alien technology works.

Some of the science involved is way out on the fringes of what is currently accepted. This is not unexpected. Almost by definition, UFOs do things that are impossible for earthly aircraft; otherwise they would not be mysterious.

Almost a third of the reports focus on power and propulsion systems. Two of these, one on Traversable Wormholes and the other on Warp Drive, involve faster-than-light travel, and grope at the limits of scientific speculation. The hope here may be simply to offer some confirmation that travel across the galaxy is not a ridiculous idea. Some of the others, on antigravity and zero-point energy, are similarly speculative, with work carried out by Hal Puthoff and colleagues at Earth Tech International. Puthoff is considered scientifically dubious by many after his involvement with Uri Geller and remote viewing.

However, most of the propulsion research is from established academics and companies such as Lockheed Martin. It is surprisingly down-to-earth. Advanced Nuclear Propulsion, Aneutronic Fusion for Space Propulsion, Positron Propulsion and others are all sound enough in theoretical terms; they just happen to be far beyond our engineering capability. For example, Positronic Propulsion requires a good supply of antimatter, but so far only a few billionths of a gramme have ever been made.



LEFT: Traversable wormholes were a focus of one AATIP research project.

Magnetohydrodynamic (MHD) propulsion for aerospace is an advanced technology which would only be useful inside the Earth's atmosphere rather than in space. It is probably in there as MHD has previously been suggested as the method by which UFOs can manoeuvre at high speed without jets or rockets.

Another cluster of projects look at the materials science side of alien craft. Metallic glass is already being explored as an ultra-strong, resistant material. Programmable matter that can change shape on command is also starting to look feasible, having long been a feature of flying saucers with doorways opening in featureless surfaces.

The rest of the reports are scattered across a wide variety of disciplines and subject areas. One project revisited the famous Drake Equation, an attempt to calculate the number of advanced civilisations in the Milky Way. More mysteriously, another one looks at 'Maverick versus corporate inventor'. One project looks at invisibility, presumably because many UFOs seem to have the ability to 'blink out' or disappear at will. Thanks to the advent of metamaterials, invisibility is not such an impossibility as it once seemed, though it is some distance ahead of what we can currently manage.

The most sinister reports are the three that relate to weaponry. 'Pulsed high-power microwave technology' is already used in the laboratory to zap electronics from a distance and forms the basis of a number of prototype devices to stop engines at long range, a capability long associated with UFOs. There are two studies on lasers, and one of these – 'state of the art and evolution of high-power laser weapons' – is the only item on the list to retain its Classified status.

The military value of all this is somewhat doubtful. An alien race advanced enough to travel between the stars would be centuries if not millennia ahead of us. Our situation resembles a Neolithic tribe living on a tropical island that sees a nuclear bomber fly overhead. They lack the background knowledge to understand what the craft is made of, and far

less how it moves so fast and what keeps it in the air. And the only valid conclusion that the tribespeople could reach was that this is a threat for which they have no answer.

There must therefore be a suspicion that Earth defence is not necessarily the main aim of the project. It might, however, be aiming to leverage alien technology, using clues provided by UFO sightings.

For centuries, heavier-than-air flight was believed to be impossible – but within a few years of the Wright Brothers' success, dozens of other aviators were taking to the skies. They didn't need to copy the Wright Flyer's design or steal trade secrets. Simply knowing that the thing was possible, and roughly what a flying machine should look like, was enough for others to start building their own.

Similarly, the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program research projects may have been looking for a way forward. Aneutronic fusion may or may not be practical. If craft are already zipping around the Solar System, then it is definitely worth another look.

In any case, the project ended in 2012. We probably will not find out whether there is a successor programme until that too becomes safely part of history.

Reactions to the programme are likely to be mixed. On the one hand there will be those appalled by a government secretly pouring so much money into such unlikely projects, based on a fear of aliens, especially when a lot of it looks like junk science. There will also be some who see this as our best shot at building our own faster-than-light starships by borrowing the homework already done by our visitors. In between will be those who have no real idea, but think it doesn't look any worse than the rest of the Pentagon's spending...



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

233: FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

Mat Coward's hæmorrhoidal homily (FT373:25 – not too autobiographical, one hopes) has ancient support of a kind from imperial Greek doctor Galen. After saying his sister and numerous female friends are relieved from pain by menstruation (none of Pliny's nonsense about such discharges being toxic) analogous to venesection, his preferred treatment for nearly everything, he continues: "Enough of women. Consider the men who eliminate excess through a hæmorrhoid, all pass through their lives unaffected by diseases."

Still, when Galen treated emperor Marcus Aurelius's piles, he applied various ointments and administered laxatives, also binding them tightly with threads to persuade them to fall off, a remedy advised by earlier Roman doctor Celsus, also employed by Byzantine and mediæval physicians. In the latter case, the procedure was to 'chill' the excrescences before manually ripping them off, an alternative to cauterisation, a method first advocated (with many others) in Hippocrates's *Treatise on Hæmorrhoids* – various websites offer graphic pictures of medics in anal action.

We live in a 'Celeb' world, hence this (abridged) Wikipedia list of famous sufferers: Alfred the Great (see later), Napoleon, David Livingstone, Karl Marx (who remarked, "I hope the bourgeoisie will remember my carbuncles" – was Fort equally uncomfortable in his British Museum sessions?), Ernest Hemingway, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Elizabeth Taylor, George Clooney. Another list adds Casanova, King George II, Dickens, Wordsworth, and Toulouse Lautrec. For cricket-loving Mat, I add Matthew Hayden and Viv Richards. Also subjoin the cases of Kenneth Williams, whose piles handicapped his anal activities, and WH Auden, victim of a fissure caused by excessively rough sodomy, making him in biblical terms A Fissure of Men.

This suggested nomenclature may be amplified by online lists of British slang terms for piles, ranging from such obvious ones as Nobby Stiles and Belinda Carlisle to the arcane Cockney Judith Chalmers and Chalfonts.

Roman slang consisted of *Ficus* and *Marisca*, both meaning 'Fig'; cf. British equivalent, 'Grape'. In the Mediæval Age, piles were dubbed 'Saint Fiacre's Curse' after a sixth-century holy man who contracted them from tilling the earth

– from soil to boil... The *OED* dates the earliest mention of 'hæmorrhoid' to 1398.

Wonder if Neanderthals had piles? They have a long historical pedigree. Many websites claim the earliest discussion of hæmorrhoids occurs in Hammurabi's Law Code. This is somewhat fanciful. The Code does, though (does any other body of legislation address this painful subject?) stipulate that a doctor should be paid five shekels for a cure. The Egyptian so-called Ebers and Edwin Smith Papyri (c. 1500 BC) prescribe various treatments, notably astringent lotions. For more details of these and other texts, see the online 'Proctology Throughout the Ages' (1948) by leading British surgeon LEC Norbury.

God lends a hæmorrhoidal hand in various (e.g. Deuteronomy, Chronicles, Samuel) Old Testament texts by punishing the Philistines and the removers of the Ark of Covenant to Ekron with outbreaks of piles, also this blood-curdling threat: "And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reasons of the sickness day by day."

There's an online translation by Francis Adams of Hippocrates's *Treatise on Hæmorrhoids*. Cauterisation is described in wincing detail. The gentler method of ointments is recommended for women sufferers, for example goose-grease. In other volumes of the Hippocratic Corpus (not all by the man himself), they are said to be brought on by local conditions of climate, also described as chiefly afflicting people of mature and elderly years.

From a clutch of other Greek medical writers, Soranus – surely to be pronounced 'Sore Anus' – recommends holding a linen cloth to the bottom of a parturient woman to prevent a hæmorrhoidal attack – Memo to *Call the Midwife* scriptwriters...

You'd expect Aristophanes to pile on jokes for this topic. However, he preferred to ridicule passive homosexuals, his favourite adjective being 'Euryproktos' = 'wide-arse', his favourite (Dare we say it? Yes) butt a man called Cleisthenes.

Hæmorrhoids were more of a Roman pre-occupation – does this signify anything? An inscription (*CIL 4. 1820*) from Pompeii, where a particular *speculum ani* has been unearthed, wishes hæmorrhoids to torment an enemy. Juvenal (2.12-13) jeers (Peter Green's Penguin translation) thus at a pathic sufferer: "The surgeon called in to lance your swollen piles dissolves in laughter."

Martial hit off several epigrams on the matter. One (7. 71) claims an entire family – wife/husband/son/daughter/son-in-law/grandson – all had them.

Pliny and Scribonius Largus (one of Emperor Claudius's doctors) both recommend electrical treatments by the (in context) well-named *Torpedo* fish. Pliny inevitably has extra exotic remedies: onions as suppositories; drink garlic-laced wine, then vomit; rub anus with fresh root of rosemary (for remembrance? cf Simon & Garfunkel); apply boiled salt fish and/or ash of salted perch; apply a cream compounded of pig lard and rust from a chariot wheel – this last was mentioned on *QI Series A, Episode 6* (a programme for which our own Mat Coward writes).

A prime hæmorrhoidal dossier is provided in an unexpected source, Augustine's *City of God* (bk22 ch8), said in the old librarian's joke to be catalogued under Town & Country Planning. He describes how he witnessed at Carthage the agonies endured by pile-victim Innocentius from his physicians' merciless cauterisations, so much so that he expected death at the next treatment. However, thanks to the onlookers' prayers, God – more benign than the Old Testament one – intervened to bring relief and cure.

Augustine concludes: "The scene can be better imagined than described," a comment and condition well amplified in Esther Cohen's *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Univ. Chicago, 2009: for Augustine's narrative, see especially p324 n38).

When not burning his cakes – early version of Bakeoff – King Alfred's bum was burning from piles, sent by God, but this time at the victim's own request, luridly described by his contemporary biographer Asser (surely in context the perfect name) – online translation of full text available.

Alfred besought God to afflict him with various diseases, hæmorrhoids the worst, in order to rescue him from carnal desires. He endured this super-Job agony for many years, finally begging for death, at which point God transmuted the 'figs' into an unspecified but worse condition that lasted the rest of his life. Be Careful What You Wish For...

Hollywood director Billy Wilder (*Double Indemnity, Sunset Boulevard*, etc.) may have the last words: "Awards are like Hæmorrhoids. Sooner or later, every asshole gets one..."



VAXXED OFF

CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE examines the growth of 'vaccination hesitancy' and its underlying causes, from complacency to conspiracy theory

According to World Health Authority (WHO) data, 2018 saw over 60,000 cases of measles across Europe, more than double the figure for the previous year. These cases resulted in 72 deaths, twice the number for 2017. These figures are the highest recorded this century. Health experts blame 'vaccination hesitancy', fuelled by the anti-vaxxer movement. Globally, measles has seen a 30 per cent rise. *Guardian*, 22 Dec 2018; who.int/emergencies/ten-threats-to-global-health-in-2019.

Critics of anti-vaxxer parents accuse them of irresponsibility, not only towards their own children, but to other children too. For example, a child infected with measles (a highly contagious airborne disease) may infect non-vaccinated children and also those who have received the first of the two vaccination doses recommended by WHO (since 15 per cent of vaccinated children fail to develop immunity after the first dose). who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/measles.

The origins of this anti-authority, anti-expert movement lie partially in a now-discredited paper published by the-then-Dr Andrew Wakefield in *The Lancet* in 1998. Wakefield, subsequently struck off in 2010 by the General Medical Council for financial conflicts of interest and falsification of data, had proposed a link between the MMR (mumps, measles and rubella) vaccination and a sharp rise in diagnoses of autism. His claims have subsequently been refuted in numerous peer-reviewed articles. However, the numbers of readers of such specialist health journals are dwarfed by the circulation figures of, for example, the *Daily Mail*, which chose to disseminate Wakefield's claims. (M Fitzpatrick, 'Why can't the



Several Islamic clerics declared the MR vaccine to be haram

Daily Mail eat humble pie over MMR? *British Medical Journal* vol.331:7525, 2005, p1148.)

NHS data published in 2018 showed that the numbers of English children receiving the MMR vaccine had fallen for the fourth successive year to a new low of 87 per cent. Rates were lowest in London, where in some boroughs less than 80 per cent of children had been vaccinated. *D. Telegraph*, 19 Sept 2018; *S. Telegraph*, 23 Sept 2018.

The Vaccine Confidence Project, run by the University of London's School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), found in a 2016 survey that belief in the safety and efficacy of vaccination is lower in Europe than in the rest

of the world. And a 2016 Ipsos MORI poll surveying 38 European countries found that, overall, 60 per cent of adults either believed in or were uncertain about a link between autism and the MMR vaccine. In France the figure was 65 per cent, in Britain 55 per cent, and in Italy, 52 per cent. France and Italy now have lower rates of child vaccination than Rwanda

and Burundi. *D. Telegraph magazine*, 13 Oct 2018.

Opposition to mass vaccination takes various forms in different countries. As well as the MMR vaccine, the influenza and the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines have also been targeted by the anti-vaxxers. Word-of-mouth claims that the flu jab actually induces influenza-like symptoms are rife (doctors say that any such symptoms are most likely coincidental). The HPV vaccine (that protects against cervical cancer) has been accused of increasing promiscuity amongst teenage girls, who, it was argued, would be led into more risky sexual behaviour because of a mistaken belief that the vaccine offered protection against all STDs. But a 10-year University of British Columbia study of adolescent sexual health behaviour surveyed over 300,000 teenage girls, whose responses have refuted the anti-vaxxers' claims. nhs.uk, 16 Oct 2018.

LEFT: A 1980s Health Education Council poster encouraging parents to inoculate children against measles.

Populist politicians around the world have jumped on the bandwagon, aiding the spread and credibility of such beliefs by making statements questioning the wisdom of mass vaccination. In Italy, the hard-right/anti-establishment coalition government's interior minister and deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini described the country's 10 obligatory vaccinations as "useless and in many cases dangerous, if not harmful." Soon after the new government was formed, health minister Giulia Grillo changed the law to allow parents to self-certify that their children had been vaccinated (a requirement for school admission). In December 2018, Grillo sacked all 30 members of Italy's Higher Health Council, the board of experts consulted by the health ministry, on the basis that "we are the government of change". Italy's reported cases of measles rose from 850 in 2016 to 5,000 in 2018. *independent.co.uk*, 30 Aug 2018; *D. Telegraph*, 6 Dec 2018.

Donald Trump has, on more than 20 occasions, tweeted about the supposed link between vaccines and autism. For example: "Healthy young child goes to doctor, gets pumped with massive shot of many vaccines, doesn't feel good and changes – AUTISM. Many such cases!" (28 Mar 2014). Trump invited Wakefield to his inaugural ball, and has met with celebrity anti-vaccine campaigner, Robert F Kennedy Jr. (RFK's son). *independent.co.uk*, 5 May 2018.

A survey of Twitter for the July 2014-September 2017 period identified a substantial number of vaccine-related tweets traceable to the 'Internet Research Agency',



a Russian ‘troll factory’ also accused of interference in the 2016 US elections. The study, published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, noted that while many such tweets were ‘anti-vaxxer’ in nature, some were pro-vaccination. Lead author, Dr David Broniatowski of George Washington University, said: “On guns or race, these accounts take opposite sides in lots of debates. They’re about sowing discord.” *NY Times Int. Edition*, 25 Aug 2018. Destabilisation, sowing seeds of doubt, and engendering mistrust in Western governmental and official bodies, seems to be a sufficient end in itself. *D. Telegraph magazine*, 13 Oct 2018.

Scepticism seems highest in France, where mistrust of authority is combined with suspicions regarding ‘Big Pharma’. *Rassemblement National* leader Marine Le Pen backed a campaign to overturn mass vaccination programmes, arguing that not enough is yet known about the long-term consequences of multiple vaccinations, drawing attention to the profits made by vaccine manufacturers. *Guardian*, 22 Dec 2018.

However, ‘vaccine hesitancy’ is not solely a preserve of the political Right. Advocates of alternative medicine, devotees of Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy movement and certain religious groups at home and abroad have all raised objections to mass vaccinations. Over 120 UK homeopaths currently offer a ‘cure’ for autism, based on a supposed detoxification from vaccines and antibiotics. The CEASE (Complete Elimination of Autistic Spectrum Expression) ‘therapy’ involves the administration of homeopathic medicines combined with high doses of vitamin C. *Guardian*, 28 April 2018.

Outside the Western world, in Indonesia, administration of a measles-rubella (MR) vaccine ran into trouble last



ABOVE: People protest against mandatory vaccination policies in front of the Health Ministry in Paris in September 2017.

year when parents learned that the vaccine contains traces of pork due to a gelatin component. Indonesia has had one of the highest rates of measles in the world. Millions of children were kept home from school on inoculation day, after several Islamic clerics declared the MR vaccine to be *haram* (forbidden). Indonesia’s ministry of health then lobbied Muslim councils to issue a *fatwa* pronouncing MR as *halal* (on the basis that the gelatin has been rendered *halal* having undergone a purification process). Also last year, gunmen in Pakistan killed a policeman assigned to protect health workers on the first day of a government-backed campaign to vaccinate 39 million children against polio. Militants regard polio immunisation programmes as a Western plot to sterilise Pakistani children. *D. Telegraph*, 26 Sept 2018; *sciencemag.org*, 7 Nov 2018.

Something very similar happened in Nigeria during the early 2000s, when religious leaders in northern states advised their followers not to let their children be vaccinated against polio. This boycott was endorsed by Kano State’s governor. Immunisation was suspended for several months, and consequently, polio cases reappeared not only in Nigeria but in a dozen neighbouring countries that were formerly polio-free. People are also

suspicious about other vaccines, such as the one for measles. Between January and March 2005, Nigeria reported over 20,000 measles cases with nearly 600 deaths. Like Pakistan, the objection to vaccination programmes is that they are a Western conspiracy to reduce the population. *Challenges of Immunization in Nigeria*, Oct 2018, *PublichealthNg.com*. But as the LSHTM survey showed, the greatest ‘vaccine hesitancy’ is found in Europe. Why? Just as with conspiracy theories, social media has been a significant factor in the dissemination and rapid spread of the ‘anti-vaxxer’ movement; indeed, its epidemic-like spread coincided with Wakefield’s 1998 claims. In addition, films like Wakefield’s *Vaxxed: from Cover-Up to Catastrophe* are readily available to view online.

Perhaps another important aspect is that of living memory. People no longer recall a family member or neighbour who was killed or crippled by diphtheria, TB or polio – a testament to the efficacy of mass vaccination programmes. In 1980, 2.5 million people died from measles worldwide; by 2017 the figures had been reduced to 75,000. The Spanish flu pandemic that swept the world during and after WWI, and which killed more people than did the war itself, is now largely unremembered. Smallpox, now eradicated, once

killed one in seven children.

Complacency has set in, and a lack of awareness of the very real and horrific effects of infectious diseases has led to a lack of understanding of the benefits of vaccination. In the UK, for example, we are now several generations removed from the pre-mass vaccination era.

The LSHTM’s Vaccine Confidence Project 2016 survey that found more ‘vaccine hesitancy’ amongst Europeans than elsewhere in the world also found this scepticism to be greater amongst younger adults, especially regarding the MMR and influenza vaccines. Older people are more likely to have knowledge, if not direct memory, of a friend or relative who died of an infectious disease. In the 20th century, public health campaigns sought to raise public awareness about the advantages of mass vaccination. Now, in the 21st century, the WHO has to employ a Vaccine Hesitancy Working Group, whose work is in large part a response to the anti-vaxxer movement.

Governments and international public health organisations like WHO have successfully eradicated diseases that once killed millions. But these organisations are now facing a new threat – an epidemic of doubt and scepticism.

Hugo Fry, managing director of Sanofi UK, one of the world’s biggest vaccine manufacturers, warns that the incentives for pharmaceutical companies to continue producing vaccines are diminishing. Reduced demand as a result of anti-vaxxer driven mistrust, combined with a necessity for massive initial investment, is affecting future sustainability. Fewer pharma companies are participating in the vaccine field. Dr Heidi Larson of LSHTM underlined international health bodies’ dependence on the industry: “If they pull the plug, we’re screwed.” *D. Telegraph magazine*, 13 Oct 2018. See also FT374:74.



Casket cases

ALAN MURDIE looks at reports of haunted coffins in the news and exhumes some ghostly classics

"You can hear somebody walking here or running... little footsteps when we're downstairs... they're not big clumps like a man. They're little bitty feet."

These are the words of Larry Courington, Volunteer Director of Gregg County Historical Museum in Texas, in an interview in October 2018 describing the experiences of himself and other staff who hear unexplained footsteps when working at the museum. They emanate from around a metal coffin kept on the premises.

This is one of two intriguing stories both featuring the sound of child-like footfalls and the coffins of little girls that have come from the United States in recent years. In each the phenomenon is attributed to the former occupants of the coffins, who have been reburied subsequently. In the second example, from California, the mysterious footsteps were actually heard before the coffin and the little body it contained were unearthed, discovered under the backyard of a private house.

Concerning the phenomenon at Gregg County Historical Museum, Mr Courington states he has heard the footsteps many times when the museum is quiet, generally during the evenings. The sounds come from the vicinity of the upstairs area where the empty iron casket is stored. They have also been heard by other staff members simultaneously, usually when they are downstairs near the main door of the building.

Held by the museum since 1980, the coffin bears no name or inscription, but prior to its arrival contained what was reported to be the well-preserved body of a girl, estimated to have been around 11 or 12 years old. It was unearthed by construction workers engaged in levelling an area in the city of Longview. The story received by Mr Covington was that the girl originally came from West Texas and died in the 1880s during the course of a family vacation. The problem that then confronted her family was how to transport her body back home in an era before refrigeration. As an interim measure they opted to bury her body on land then forming part of the Avery Farm, close to railway tracks, her coffin a donation from the Northcutt Hardware Company. This temporary step became permanent as the family never returned to collect their daughter. After rediscovery nearly a century later, the body was re-interred at Greenwood Cemetery, near Highway 80.

A similar story of haunting footsteps was



ABOVE: Gregg County Historical Museum. BELOW: The iron casket – source of the phantom footsteps?

The sounds come from the vicinity of the upstairs area where the iron casket is stored



reported on the ABC 7 news Channel in 2016 and 2017. Prior to the discovery of a small metal coffin in their yard in May 2016, Erika and John Karner who live in the Lone Mountain district of San Francisco had been puzzled by mysterious footsteps around their house. The tightly sealed casket also lacked

any inscription, but the excavators were able to see inside it through two window panels set into the lid. These exposed to view portions of the well-preserved remains of a little girl. Quite understandably, the Karters (who have two young daughters themselves) were emotionally affected by this. "When we discovered her, we thought, 'That could be my little girl,'" said John, while his wife Erika admitted to experiencing "a lot of emotion as a mom". The presence of the burial was explained by their home standing in a street erected on the site of what once had been the Odd Fellows Cemetery. This closed around 1902 and the bodies were later exhumed and transferred to Greenlawn Cemetery at Colma, but for some reason this unidentified single grave was left untouched.

In addition to the puzzling footsteps, heard on the floor above them, the Karner household experienced what Ericka described as "a whole series of things", a phrase suggestive of the low-level physical activity that typically arises in many domestic hauntings. These had "gone on for years". She stated: "We know very well what a toddler sounds like, and it wasn't our kids." Workmen also said they heard footsteps too, before uncovering the coffin.

Once news of the discovery spread, a charitable foundation called the Garden of Innocence National, which provides dignified burials for abandoned children, arranged

MICHAEL BARERA / CREATIVE COMMONS

a new tombstone and reburial. The words "The Child Loved Round The World" were etched on a headstone with remains laid to rest at Green Lawn Cemetery. Then in 2017, after nearly a year of dedicated research, workers for the charity, using funeral home records and DNA evidence, managed to positively identify the girl as Edith Howard Cook, the daughter of Horatio Nelson and Edith Scoffy Cook. Edith died aged two on 13 October 1876, her identity confirmed by comparing hair samples with a modern DNA sample taken from a living descendant of her family. Funeral records stated Edith's cause of death was 'marasmus', a 19th century term for cases of severe undernourishment, a condition that might arise in many ways, the most likely being an infectious disease. Explaining their efforts, Elissa Davey for the charity told ABC 7 News: "We just fell in love with her and wanted her to have her name back. She deserved that."

Unexplained footsteps are one of the most frequently reported ghostly phenomena and stories like these, particularly that of the Karners, find parallels across numerous cultures and locations over more than 2,000 years (see *In Search of Ghosts*, 1995, by Ian Wilson). It is hard to account for such diffusion since most people would find the thought of discovering an unknown corpse or skeleton in or under their home upsetting, even abhorrent. Even today there is reluctance among many to occupy homes built on former burial sites.

Here, because the footsteps in these two cases are deemed to be linked to a deceased little girl, in neither case have witnesses expressed any sense of alarm or fear about their experiences. However, whereas the footsteps at Gregg County Museum are reported as continuing, the Karners declare their haunting ceased entirely once the grave was found.

(Sources: Jamey Boyum 29 Oct 2018 www.kltv.com/2018/10/29/mystery-footsteps-heard-around-century-old-coffin/; *Los Angeles Times* 10 May 2017; 'Girl from 1800s found in casket in backyard ID'd' *ABC Eyewitness News* 11 May 2017; <https://abc7chicago.com/news/couple-says-they-heard-footsteps-before-coffin-was-found-in-back-yard/1975976/>; www.gardenofinnocence.org/miranda-eve-childs-casket-found-under-home).

Specific references to coffins, both phantom and material, feature in British ghostlore. The 18th century classic is the Cock Lane Ghost (See 'A Haunting on Scandal Street: The Cock Lane Ghost Revisited' by Roger Clarke, **FT335:36-41**) where the intrepid investigators, after communicating via questions and raps with the supposed ghost 'Scratching Fanny' in a bedroom, on its directions took themselves down into a burial vault to see if the spirit



ABOVE: The sealed child's casket found in the yard of Erika and John Karner in San Francisco; the glass window panels revealed the body of a little girl, subsequently identified as Edith Howard Cook.

would then obligingly rap upon the coffin lid of the allegedly murdered Fanny Lines (it didn't).

Apparitional coffin imagery is often symbolic, with ghostly caskets being accompanied by figures that coincide in time with the death of a specific person. In August 1857 a Mrs Hunter was entertaining some friends while her husband was away in India. Returning to her dining room for a moment, she passed by the open door of her bedroom and felt a curious compulsion to look in. There on the bed was a large coffin, and sitting at the foot of it was a tall old woman steadfastly regarding it. Returning to her friends, she mentioned this vision to hoots of laughter, in which, after a while, she also joined. But later that night after the friends had left, she was approached by the nursemaid to her child who reported, "Oh ma'am, I feel so queer, such a strange thing happened." She related seeing, at seven o'clock that evening, a tall, old woman in a dark dress, poke bonnet and black-and-white shawl coming downstairs. Stopping to let her pass, she then turned to look again as "there was

something strange about her" and watched the figure making for the hall door before suddenly melting away. This description of the clothing matched the vision of Mrs Hunter earlier.

Still endeavouring to laugh the matter off, Mrs Hunter retired to bed until, about half an hour later, she heard a piercing scream coming from her five-year-old daughter, followed by "loud, frightened tones", and then the nurse soothing the child. The nurse had discovered her daughter fully awake, sitting up in bed, pointing to the table, and crying out, "Go away, go away, naughty old woman". A day or two afterwards, Mrs Hunter learned that a Mrs Macfarlane, a former nursemaid to her husband who also took care of some of Mrs Hunter's personal belongings, had died; according to her son, his mother's last hours were disturbed by anxiety for the Hunter family. (*Proceedings of the SPR*, 1882-83, v.1 at 122).

On the evening of 24 March 1845, a Lieut-Colonel Jones stationed in the Far East was dining at a friend's house at Moulmein in Burma. In the middle of a conversation on some local affairs, he reported that "I



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distinctly saw before me the form of an open coffin, with a favourite sister of mine, then at home, lying in it apparently dead." Falling silent he recalled, "everyone looked at me with astonishment, and asked what was the matter" – and he duly told them, trying to deal with his experience in a humorous way, "and it was looked upon as a joke". But not, it transpired, ultimately a funny one as two months later, on 17 May, he received a letter from home announcing his sister's death as having taken place on that very day in March. Allowing for time distances, the coincidence between her death and the vision was calculated to be near, and may have been exact (*Proceedings of the SPR*, 1884, 109 at 176-177).

Somewhat less dramatic experiences involving coffin imagery continue into modern times, though now largely reported in dreams. ('Five Sources of Evidence for Survival After Death', the Second Gwen Tate memorial lecture, Professor Ian Stevenson in *Paranormal Review*, 1997, 18).

Occasionally, a ghostly coffin is claimed as an apparition in its own right, as with the specimen said to float over Woodchester lakes, not far from the reputedly haunted Woodchester mansion; potentially providing another reason for people to heed advice not to swim there (*Gloucester Citizen*, 16 April 1987; *Bristol Live*, 1 Aug 2018). A phantom coffin is said to materialise on the Bridgewater Road between St Audries and Holford in Somerset, haunted additionally by a black dog (Ruth Tongue in *Somerset Folklore*, 1956).

In other stories where coffins are linked with strange noises, this may just be for literary effect, as devices inserted to induce flesh-creeping sensations in readers. In 'The Staircase and the Pit' (a story supposedly received from a doctor friend of ghost hunter Elliot O'Donnell), a loud noise is heard coming from upstairs by a maid and a cook in a badly haunted house in Camberwell. Described "as though a great weight had suddenly been dropped on the floor", it prompts the cook in the story to remark ("with a shudder"), it was "like the sound of a big box – or a coffin". Just how the cook might be acquainted with the sound of a dropped coffin is not explained, but it appears to be an invented dialogue aimed at heightening the tension as the story approaches its climax. (From O'Donnell's collection of yarns entitled *The Midnight Hearse and Other Ghost Stories*, posthumously published in 1965 under the editorship of Harry Ludlam).

However, knocking sounds perceived as hammering nails into a coffin are recognised in Scottish second sight stories as a death warning (lecture by Dr Shari Cohn, School of Scottish Studies to the SPR, London, 15 Oct 1997). Phantom



pallbearers carrying spectral coffins form an important class of death-wraiths though infrequent today, belonging more to the age of elaborate mourning rituals and closer communities.

Other processions of spectral coffin-bearers appear to have no prophetic role. Tradition claims an empty coffin carried by monks is conveyed annually around Cippenham Place in Buckinghamshire every May. This apparition is said to stem from events in the reign of Elizabeth I. Since this was after the Reformation, it indicates a confused tradition; nearby Burnham Abbey was occupied by nuns, so any monks must have come from further afield and arise from an earlier time. Regrettably, the exact date in May is forgotten. (Anne Mitchell, *Ghosts Along the Thames*, 1972).

Esoteric writer Stephen Jenkins told Colin Wilson of how he and his wife encountered four hooded men carrying a coffin at Belchamp Walter in Essex on 28 August 1977; he dated them to the 14th century from their clothing. Jenkins claimed numerous strange sightings over many years, but my own efforts in 2005 to trace him, via his last official publisher at Saffron Walden, were in vain and I fear he must have joined the shades himself. (See *Poltergeist! A Study in Destructive Haunting*, 1981, by Colin Wilson).

Finally, on the metaphorical level one might consider sealed coffins as the emblem of closed minds and incredulous academic attitudes towards ghostly experiences. Generations of thinkers and philosophers peering down on witnesses who report hauntings display an unwillingness, conscious or repressed, to entertain any idea that the dead might live on, other than in the memories of the living or through cultural influence (e.g. artistic and literary works, monuments, wills and succession etc). Faced with ghost reports in each generation, they have battled continually to try to confine the deceased to their coffins, by way of all manner of ingenious theories and intellectual denials of the evidence for discarnate and post-mortem activity. To allow for such

LEFT: Cippenham Place, said to have an annual visit from monks carrying an empty coffin.

a possibility would mount unacceptable epistemological challenges to materialist theories of the world. Often the very idea of ghosts is the subject of scornful laughter, at least in public (though privately different views may often be expressed). The problem is that in every generation the dead reportedly keep coming out.

Yet I confess to also being troubled myself, especially regarding the popular view that the spirits of young children can be bound to the Earth. It was a stance encapsulated in the comment uttered by a television news commentator in the case of the phantom footsteps heard by the Karners, in wistfully proclaiming: "In life, death, and for eternity – little Edith Howard Cook will always be two years, 10 months and 15 days old." It is hardly an attractive notion. Hearing this casual comment, I found myself re-experiencing my own personal reactions of unease regarding another child ghost, often uncritically offered up as proof of survival, for instance in two optimistically entitled books, *You Cannot Die* (1979) by Ian Currie and *Life is Forever: Evidence for Survival After Death* (1999) by Suzy Smith. While not wishing to disparage the undoubtedly appeal of the idea of an afterlife, these authors cite the troubling case of Johnny Minney, a small boy who, to quote Anthony Hippesley Coxe in *Haunted Britain* (1973), "died most pathetically" in the bedroom of a Huntingdonshire farmhouse in August 1921.

Forty-five years later, on 7 July 1966, a lady visitor from Australia stayed at the farm in the same room, only two days after landing in England. On her first night, she was awoken by a small boy kneeling by her bedside, with a thin, drawn face and pleading look. His hands seemed to be clawing at her arm and she knew he wanted to call his mother. Eventually she did call out 'Mummy' and the figure disappeared. Later local enquiries reached the elderly aunt of Johnny Minney, who duly confirmed he had died, aged four, in that room after falling ill with cerebral meningitis while his parents were away, and that "during the illness he often used to call out for his mother during the night." The facts were confirmed by investigator Andrew MacKenzie in his book *Frontiers of the Unknown* (1968). Together, Currie and Smith have felt this to be evidence that Johnny's spirit had remained in the room, still calling desperately for a mother who never comes.

While one may ultimately have to face hard facts in death as much as in life, I feel that survival for a child in such a state would be one of the crueler post-mortem fates imaginable, if these writers are correct.

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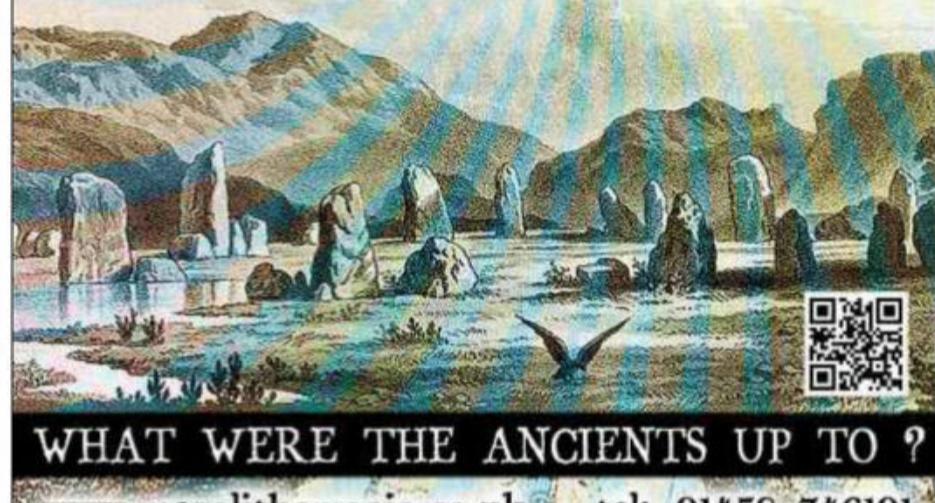
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KARL SHUKER reports on flying Oz monkeys in California and a plague of white rats in Italy

FLYING MONKEYS IN NAPA

Among the many memorable spectacles on view in MGM's classic 1939 fantasy musical film 'The Wizard of Oz' was a flock of malevolent flying monkeys that did the Wicked Witch of the West's evil bidding. According to various decidedly bizarre claims and sightings emanating from California's Napa Valley, however, these monstrous things with wings may not be entirely confined to the movies. Mysterious entities with bat-like wings, red eyes, long fangs and claws, black fur, and said to bear a striking overall resemblance to said flying monkeys have lately been reported from around Partrick Road, which is just outside the town of Napa. Apparently, they would traditionally lurk amid the shadowy trees fringing this particular stretch of secluded back-road, winding out of Napa and through a dense forest, in order to accost the young amorous couples who parked here for some private sessions of passion. Nowadays, however, presumably because fewer such sessions occur as reports of



these uncanny beasts have intensified, the volant voyeurs have taken instead to pursuing any car that drives along Partrick Road, regardless of whether or not it stops. At the far end of this lonely road is the blocked entrance to a forsaken, long-abandoned cemetery

once owned by the Partrick family after whom the road is named, where the flying monkeys supposedly dwell when not pursuing the neighbouring populace. As if all of this isn't surreal enough, however, it is popularly believed among the Napa locals that the flying monkeys were artificially created by some shadowy government scientist(s) either to detract attention from more serious events of the classic X-Files variety, such as covert surveillance by mysterious black helicopters and Doomsday trials, or even as an attempt to create a futuristic type of soldier, and that they are part-monkey and part-robot. Hence they are commonly dubbed Rebobs locally. Interestingly, however, the First Nation people of Napa have supposedly been long familiar with these entities, considering them to be an ancient race of beings, and they refer to this particular area as the Valley of Fairies. <https://exemplor.com/paranormal/Rebob-The-Flying-Monkeys-of-Napa-Valley>; <http://clipclopworkshop.com/rebobs/>

WHERE'S THE PIED PIPER WHEN YOU NEED HIM?

The small northern Italian village of Gattolino (whose name translates as 'little cat', somewhat ironically given its current plight) is situated in the province of Cesena, and throughout much of January 2019 it has been infested by a veritable plague of rats. But these are no ordinary rats, for not only do they seemingly delight in killing each other and in jumping in front of oncoming cars (which often has the same result!), but in addition they are pure white in colour – all of which has earned them the local nickname of 'crazy white rats'. Countless numbers have been emerging at night and filmed by the dashcams of approaching cars as they scurry with lemming-like suicidal zeal directly in front of the oncoming vehicles' wheels. But where have these distinctively-coloured rodents come from? According to the local mayor, an old pigeon-breeding enclosure closed last year, and the rats may have been finding food and shelter inside it until the food there was consumed by them, after which they would have been forced to scour the immediate countryside in search of sustenance. However,

this explanation signally fails to identify where these white rats came from before they found temporary shelter and food inside the closed-down pigeon-breeding enclosure. After all, white-coloured rats rarely if ever occur naturally in wild rat populations, and certainly never in the great numbers being witnessed at Gattolino. Regardless of their origin, however, their current presence here is sufficiently disturbing in every sense to have induced the launching by the Cesena authorities of a joint task-force uniting the police, the fire brigade, and a team of sanitary inspectors in order to deal with this Hamelinesque plague of vermin besieging Gattolino. Environmental technicians and public health officials working with the local police are also attempting to determine whether these mysterious white rats are carrying any diseases. A YouTube video released by the *Guardian* newspaper includes dashcam footage of some such rats scurrying across the roads and emerging from the undergrowth on either side of them. www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/24/white-rats-italian-village; www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=ZUuF7yay65k





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| More dead cats (and rabbits), the popularity of fake 'vampire hunting kits', and the breatharian pizza guy...

CROYDON CAT KILLER [FT373:18-20]

 Last September, the police closed Operation Takahe, their investigation into cat killing in London and the south-east, blaming all the deaths on vehicle collisions and fox depredation. The investigation had lasted three years and cost £130,000. However, individual police officers, three vets and an animal rescue organisation still believe that humans are targeting cats and other pets. In December a man was jailed in Northampton for a string of arson attacks and cat mutilations. SNARL (South Norwood Animal Rescue and Liberty) said that, since then, it has learned of at least seven other unsolved killings. Cases were reported to it from as far north as Manchester and Liverpool and as far west as Devon and Cornwall. "But the majority are around the south-east London area and are indicative of someone travelling around the south-east," said Tony Jenkins, co-founder of SNARL. "It could be a sales rep, someone who has got a job that sees them travel around a lot and they stop off to kill a cat or a rabbit or a fox... There is a case in Dartford at the moment that is still being investigated by Kent police. There is no way it was done by a fox." Cats are not the only animals targeted. "We've had a case in Watford where a rabbit was taken out of a locked hutch, killed, and its body left in the middle of a lawn so that it was visible from the bedroom window," Jenkins said. The rabbit's head was returned to the spot where the body was found six months later. *Eve. Standard*, 18 Dec; *D.Mail*, 19 Dec; *Guardian (online)*, 19 Jan 2019.

Four pet cats were killed and three maimed in Brighton, West Sussex, between mid-September and 26 November 2018 – all in the vicinity of Ditchling Rise, close to the city's railway station. Tony Jenkins did not believe the

ABOVE: A vampire hunting kit sold at Christie's Paris in 2013 for 10,000 euros.



attacks were connected to the Croydon cat killer. "We think it is a separate perpetrator because there are stab wounds and the injuries are different." *Sunday Express*, 25 Nov; *Times*, 26 Nov; *Brighton and Hove Independent*, 30 Nov 2018.

Last October, detectives in Brittany were hunting a killer believed responsible for beating to death about 100 pet rabbits in and around the town of Minihy-Tréguier in the Côtes-d'Armor region since the previous March. "The cages are opened, then the animals are killed in cold blood and left at the scene," said a police spokesman. About 10 properties had been targeted, some on more than one occasion, with the animals beaten, stamped upon and hit with a hard object. *Times*, 26 Oct; *D.Telegraph*. 27 Oct 2018.

VAMPIRE KITS [FT288:32-39, 291:5]

 Museums and private collectors have been purchasing bogus vampire hunting kits. The Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds bought one such kit for £7,500

in June 2012. The mahogany box contained an ornate pistol, bullet-mould, bottle of 'holy water', rosary beads, crucifix, four wooden stakes, mallet, 'holy earth', garlic, the Book of Common Prayer and a handwritten biblical verse (Luke 19:27). Jonathan Ferguson, Curator of Firearms at the museum (who wrote FT's feature on these kits) found that while the individual components of the kit purchased by the museum were Victorian, the kit itself was probably assembled in the 1970s.

He then subjected a number of similar kits to tests including X-rays and checks on ink, paper, glue and the boxes themselves. None of the kits out of the 100 regularly found to be changing hands at auction were exactly alike, but he established that none of them were what they claimed. The Royal Armouries exhibit was rumbled after an X-ray revealed a rogue screw and the fact that the box was made after 1925. "There will be some who feel cheated," said Ferguson. "One kit I examined belonged to a millionaire who dreamed of owning one and paid thousands for it."

Writing on the British Museum

blog, Ferguson justified the continued exhibition of the Royal Armouries kit: "Vampire kits are not fakes per se, because there is no evidence of a Victorian original... Although I had set out to 'debunk' their very existence, I came to realise that these enigmatic objects transcend questions of authenticity. They are part of the material culture of the gothic; aspects of our shared literary and cinematic passions made physical. Lacking any surviving artefact of vampirism either folkloric or fictional, fans of the gothic had created one to fill the gap." *Sunday Express*, 27 Jan 2019.

LIVING ON LIGHT [FT313:14, 359:25]

 A pizza delivery man who identifies as a 'breatharian' claims Hindu meditation has helped him to collect all the nutrients he needs from the air and can survive on just 100 calories a week. Khai Ho, 38, from Birkenhead, Merseyside, often refused his mother's meals as a child, claiming he never felt hunger and food never appealed to him. Over the last four years Khai, a healthy 182lb (82kg) in weight, claims to have given up food and water for three months at a time, only eating mints to stop the 'bitter taste' in his mouth. Despite fasting for long periods, he says that he never struggles to resist the food he delivers to customers and that he has never been happier or healthier. He claims to gather his nutrients from sunlight and can even take in the moisture he needs from the air. He says that he now looks half his age and that a previous liver problem had improved thanks to his prolonged periods of fasting. Breatharians claim that food, and in some cases water, are not necessary for survival, and that humans can be sustained solely by prana, the vital life force in Hindu religion. *mirror.co.uk*, 10 Dec; *unexplained-mysteries.com*, 13 Dec 2018.



PAUL SIEVEKING mulls over new revelations about Stone Age art and ancient Egyptian socks



STONE AGE ASTRONOMERS

Researchers have concluded that cave paintings from Turkey, Spain, France and Germany, up to 40,000 years old, were not simply decorative, but represent a complex understanding of astronomy pre-dating Greek civilization. These Stone Age people evidently knew how to keep track of time based on the movement of stars in the sky. They understood the precession of the equinoxes – the idea that the Earth's movement was causing the changes of star location, not the stars themselves. History generally credits this idea to Hipparchus of Nicea, regarded as possibly the greatest astronomical genius among the ancient Greeks. Several cultures, from China to Babylonia, discovered the idea independently, but it seems the idea was Palaeolithic.

After studying a cave drawing in Lascaux, southern France, known as 'The Shaft Scene' – and combining radiocarbon dating and atmospheric history – scientists believe the picture of a dying man was made to commemorate a comet striking the planet in around 15,200 BC. Around the time "The Shaft Scene" was created, a climate change event was recorded in a Greenland ice core. Using powerful computer programs, they were able to compare these dates to the predicted positions of the stars.

Researchers now believe that several ancient cave paintings were made in recognition of climate change events. For example, the stone pillars at Göbekli Tepe in southeastern Turkey, particularly Pillar 43, "can be viewed as a memorial to the proposed Younger Dryas event [a period of abrupt climate change 14,500 years

ago]". From cave site to cave site, and from one ancient time period to another, researchers found a consistent method of time-keeping. The research, published in *Athens Journal of History*, shows that what look like abstract depictions of animals could be interpreted as zodiac signs based on constellations as they appeared at the time. "Early cave art shows that people had advanced knowledge of the night sky within the last Ice Age," says Martin Sweatman, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Engineering, who led the study. "Intellectually, they were hardly any different to us today." sciencedaily.com, via popularmechanics.com, 29 Nov 2018.

below: The world's earliest known drawing – a criss-cross pattern in red ochre.

EARLIEST KNOWN DRAWING

A zig-zag pattern engraved into a mussel shell, found in Trinil, Java, presumably made by *Homo erectus*, is regarded as the earliest engraving – date to between 430,000 and 540,000 years ago [FT325:16]. However, the earliest known drawing is thought to be a criss-cross pattern made with a red ochre crayon on a chunk of rock. It was found among spear points in Blombos Cave on the southern tip of South Africa in 2011, and was made a mere 73,000 years ago. The simple red marks – six thin lines crossed by three others, slightly curved – adorn a flake just 38mm (1.5in) long that appears to have broken off a grindstone cobble used to turn lumps of ochre into paint powder. The artefact has been nicknamed #L13. Humans in the Blombos cave were making ochre paint as far back as 100,000 years ago. Until now, the oldest known drawings have been the more impressive and extensive works that cover cave walls in El Castillo in Spain [FT294:22] and Maros in Sulawesi, Indonesia [FT321:18]. But those abstract and figurative images were made more recently, 40,000 years ago at most. The oldest surviving ochre crayon, about 10,000 years old, was found in Yorkshire [FT371:14].

Located about 300km (186 miles) east of Cape Town, Blombos cave has proved a treasure trove of ancient human artefacts from 100,000 to 70,000 years old. Excavations have uncovered painted shell beads, double-sided spear points, *Homo sapiens* teeth and pieces of ochre engraved with cross-hatching. To achieve the narrow lines found on the chunk of grindstone, the ochre must have been hard and pointed, its tip between one and three millimetres wide, according to a report in the journal *Nature*.

"The lines are very deliberate," said Christopher Henshilwood, leader of the research team. "When we reproduced



the lines, you have to have a very firm hand and have to apply the ochre quite determinedly to make them look like that." He believes that *Homo sapiens* used the grindstone, a silcrete cobble, to turn hard ochre rocks into a powder suitable for paint. The grindstone was then washed and the cross-hatched design added to the smooth, dipped surface produced by the grinding process. At some point later, the cobble was broken and the marked fragment left behind. *theguardian.com, BBC News, 12 Sept; NY Times, 17 Sept 2018.*



SOCK OF AGES

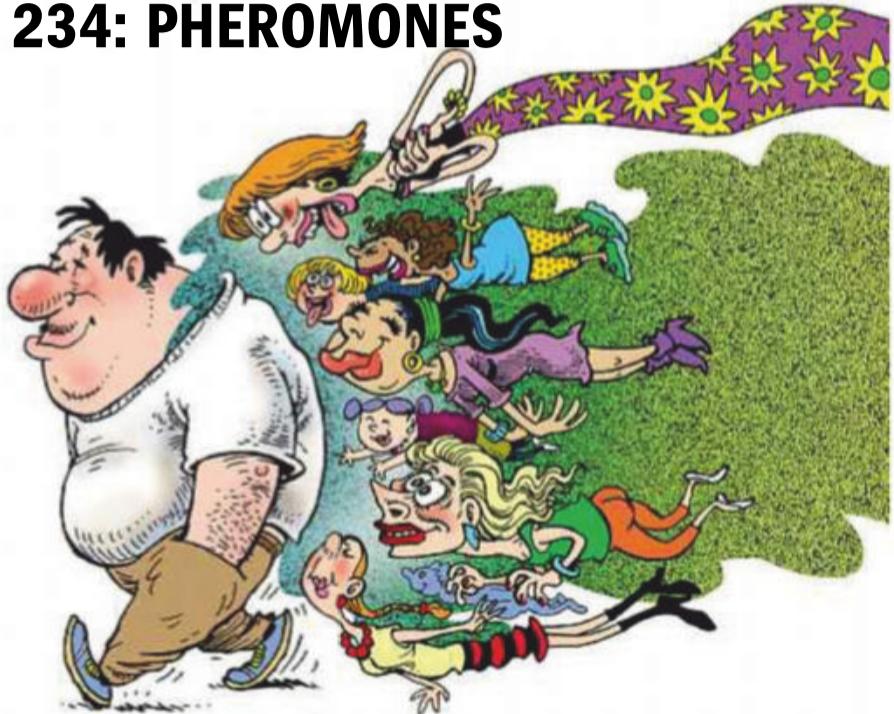
British Museum scientists have developed imaging techniques to discover how ancient Egyptians used dyes on a tiny child's sock, recovered from a rubbish dump in ancient Antinopolis in Roman Egypt and dating from AD 300. Multispectral imaging can establish which dyes were used – madder (red), woad (blue) and weld (yellow) – but also how people of Late Antiquity used double and sequential dying, and the weaving and twisting of fibres, to create myriad colours from their scarce resources. Critically, the imaging method is non-invasive. Previous methods required physical samples to be taken. While socks have been around since the Stone Age, when cave dwellers used pelts or animal skins, ancient Egyptians are thought to be responsible for the first knitted socks, designing them with one compartment for the big toe and another for the rest to allow them to be worn with sandals. *Guardian, 5 Oct 2018.*



MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

234: PHEROMONES



The myth

Like many other species, humans secrete pheromones – chemicals produced by one individual that affect the behaviour of another individual. Pheromones are what make us fancy one person rather than another; they are what make men's sweaty T-shirts so exciting to ovulating women; and they are, of course, what make teenagers' bedrooms smell so bad.

The "truth"

No human pheromone has ever been identified. Not a single one. That's not to say they don't exist – there is evidence to suggest that they probably do, although humans lack the organ used by other mammals for detecting them – but for all the effort expended over many years, researchers have yet to find them. That might perhaps surprise the customers who, over the last few decades, have spent a fortune on the widely available "pheromone-based" perfumes, which promise to massively increase your success with the opposite sex by harnessing the wonders of molecular science. This very column bought a bottle of this devil juice in 1985, purely for experimental purposes, and is still waiting for it to take effect. Perhaps just one more dab behind the ear? An important thing to remember about pheromones is that they are universal in their effect: all members of a species react similarly to a specific pheromone. So, for instance, experiments showing that humans might be chemically guided in their individual choice of mates, thus encouraging genetic resilience, has nothing to do with pheromones.

Sources

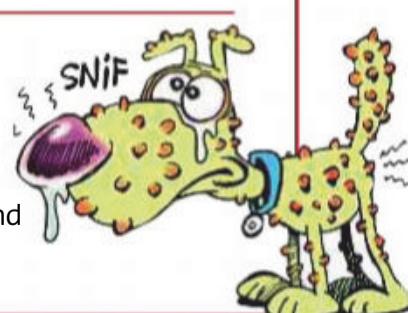
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Disclaimer

Some companies that sell "human pheromone" products say that their own double-blind experiments prove their efficacy. That may, of course, be true – but there are as yet no widely accepted, peer-reviewed proofs of the existence of human pheromones.

Mythchaser

A reader who owns a hypoallergenic dog wants to know if it's true that there is no such thing as a hypoallergenic dog. (Please bear in mind that an innocent dog's employment prospects may depend on your answer).



CITY OF TENEA FOUND

Archaeologists led by Elena Korka have found the first tangible remains of a lost city said to have been settled by Trojan prisoners-of-war after the Greek sack of Troy. Up to now, Tenea was only known from ancient texts, but excavations in the southern Peloponnese last September/October uncovered the city's urban fabric, including floors, walls and door openings, as well as remnants of residences, pottery, coins and tombs, dating from the 4th century BC to late Roman times. It was thought the city had survived Rome's invasion of nearby Corinth; coins discovered on site dated to Emperor Septimius Severus (AD 193-211), indicated economic success. "During the Roman years Tenea minted coins," said Dr Korka. "This shows full independence." Tenea was probably damaged by Visigoths between 396 and 397 and abandoned some 200 years later during Slavic raids. *USA Today, Western Mail, 14 Nov; NY Times, 21 Nov 2018.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

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NECROLOG

This month, we bid farewell to the erudite magician who appeared in films by David Mamet and others, and the co-discoverer of the charm quark...



RICKY JAY

In his article "Secrets of the Magus", Mark Singer (*New Yorker*, 5 April 1993), relates the following.

The playwright David Mamet and the theatre director Gregory Mosher affirm that some years ago, late one night in the bar of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Chicago, this happened:

Ricky Jay, who is perhaps the most gifted sleight-of-hand artist alive, was performing magic with a deck of cards. Also present was a friend of Mamet and Mosher's named Christ Nogulich, the director of food and beverage at the hotel. After 20 minutes of disbelief-suspending manipulations, Jay spread the deck face up on the bar counter and asked Nogulich to concentrate on a specific card but not to reveal it. Jay then assembled the deck face down, shuffled, cut it into two piles, and asked Nogulich to point to one of the piles and name his card.

"Three of clubs," Nogulich said, and he was then instructed to turn over the top card.

He turned over the three of clubs.

Mosher, in what could be interpreted as a passive-aggressive

distinct change of procedure." A longer pause. "All right – what was the card?"

"Two of spades."

Jay nodded, and gestured toward the other pile, and Mosher turned over its top card.

The deuce of spades.

A small riot ensued.

Ricky Jay – master-showman magician, actor, scholar, special effects consultant and author – could hit a target with a single playing card at 190 feet and could aim multiple cards at a fresh watermelon, piercing its flesh time after time. But those who had little interest in stage magic had opportunities to see him in his 40 or so film and TV roles. In the Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) he played a cyber-terrorist, and in *Boogie Nights* (1997), a porn film camera operator. He narrated the 1999 anthology film *Magnolia* and appeared in a magic-themed episode of *The X-Files* ("The Amazing Maleeni") in 2000. He played a cardsharp, Eddie Sawyer, on the first season (2004) of HBO's notably dark Wild West series *Deadwood*. In his first film, David Mamet's thriller *House*

act, quietly announced, "Ricky, you know, I also concentrated on a card."

After an interval of silence, Jay said, "That's interesting, Gregory, but I only do this for one person at a time."

Mosher persisted: "Well, Ricky, I really was thinking of a card."

Jay paused, frowned, stared at Mosher, and said, "This is a

of Games (1987), he portrayed the obviously superior poker player who stuns Joe Mantegna's cocky character by beating his three aces. "Club flush," his character announces calmly. "You owe me \$6,000. Thank you very much. Next case." He had roles in other Mamet films, including *The Spanish Prisoner*, *Redbelt* and *State and Main*.

From the beginning of his showbusiness career, Jay was a colourful character, with chest-length dark hair in his youth and a bushy matching beard. A large man, he could have been mistaken for a roadie in the years he was opening for rock groups. In later years, he cut his hair but kept the beard. Over the decades, he was a regular on talk shows hosted by the likes of Johnny Carson and David Letterman. He and a partner, Michael Weber, founded Deceptive Practices, a consulting firm, in the 1990s. Their film-industry projects included a wheelchair that made Gary Sinise's Vietnam War-veteran character in *Forrest Gump* appear to be a double amputee. A 2012 documentary about Jay's life and career was titled *Deceptive Practice: The Mysteries and Mentors of Ricky Jay*. As an author of 11 books, he earned enthusiastic reviews. His last, entitled (in part) *Matthias Buchinger: The Greatest German Living* (2016), was pronounced awe-inspiring by *The Los Angeles Times* and beguiling by *The New York Review of Books*. Writing in *The New York Times*, Charles McGrath described Jay as the "master of a prose style that qualifies him as perhaps the last of the great 19th-century authors."

Richard Jay Potash was the older of two children of Samuel Potash and Shirley (Katz) Potash and the grandson of Max Katz, a Hungarian-born accountant who was also an accomplished amateur magician. The family soon moved from

Brooklyn to Elizabeth, New Jersey. Ricky first performed magic in public at a magicians' association picnic in Sheepshead Bay, at the age of four. At seven, he appeared on a television show called *Time for Pets*, plopping a guinea pig into a top hat and appearing to turn it into a chicken. The sign behind him said "World's Youngest Magician."

As a teenager, he ran away to work in Lake George, the upstate New York resort area. Later he was booked at the Electric Circus, the East Village hippie-era temple, doing his act between Ike and Tina Turner's music and Timothy Leary's lectures on LSD. Early on, he knew he didn't want to do the kind of magic other people were doing, so he started buying old books to research the history of the form. He built his fame with what Mark Singer called an "out-of-left-field brand of gonzo-hip comedy magic, a combination of chops and artistic irreverence." His Off Broadway productions included *Ricky Jay and His 52 Assistants*, directed by David Mamet. His other books included *Cards as Weapons* (1977), *Learned Pigs and Fireproof Women* (1986) and *Celebrations of Curious Characters* (2011). Reviewing *Learned Pigs...* in the *Times*, John Gross wrote: "One effect of Mr Jay's scholarship is to make it clear that even among freaks and prodigies there is very little new under the sun. Show him a stone-eater or a human volcano or an enterologist and he will show you the same thing being done before, often hundreds of years earlier."

Mark Singer again: "Ricky Jay does closeup magic that flouts reality. But, rather than headline in Las Vegas, Jay prefers to live in the mysterious world of ancient mountebanks, eccentric entertainers, and sleight-of-hand artists, whose



secrets he preserves with a scholarly passion, and who are his true peers in the realm of illusion."

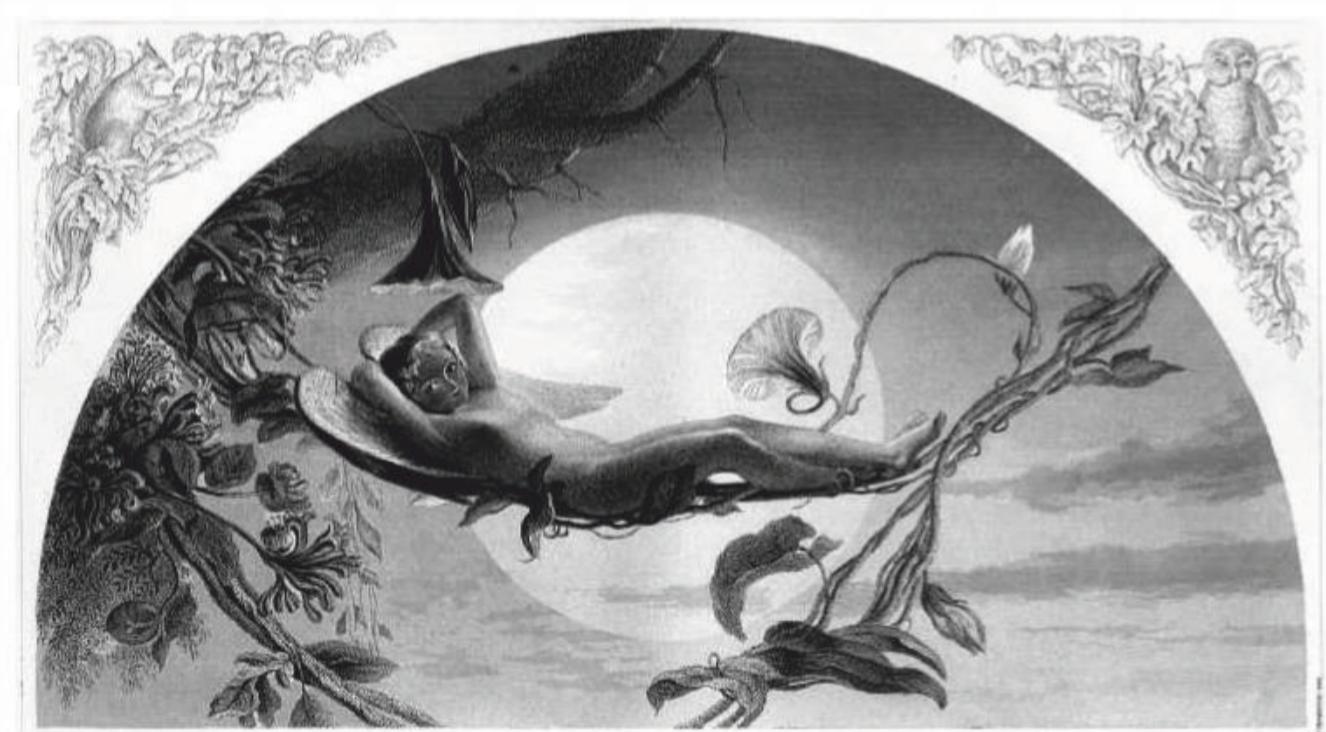
Richard Jay Potash (aka Ricky Jay), magician and scholar, born Brooklyn, NY 1946 (or 1948); died Los Angeles, 24 Nov 2018, aged 70 (or so).

BURTON RICHTER

Richter shared the 1976 Nobel Prize with Sam Ting for their discovery of a subatomic particle that triggered a revolution in the understanding of matter. In 1974, two new particles were found: one, called the psi, by Richter at Stanford, using the new Stanford Positron Electron Accelerating Ring (which accelerated electrons and positrons in opposite directions around a circular ring to cause high energy collisions releasing new particles); the other, called the J, at Brookhaven National Laboratory, by Ting, using a different procedure.

The two men met on 11 November and concluded the two particles were the same; they called it the J/psi meson. The odd behaviour of this new particle could only be explained according to the theory of quarks, the building blocks of protons, neutrons and numerous exotic particles known as mesons. Many scientists had previously seen quarks as abstractions rather than things with a physical existence, but there was now only one way to understand subatomic particles; belief in quarks was no longer optional. Before the J/psi discovery, standard theory included three quarks, known as up, down and strange. Some theorists had suggested a fourth should exist; they gave it the whimsical name "charm" and it soon became clear that the J/psi was made of a charm quark paired with a charm antiquark, each circling the other. A charmed circle, beginning anywhere, adding a little fortean frisson to our existence.

Burton Richter, physicist, born Brooklyn, NY 22 Mar 1931; died 18 July 2018, aged 87.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

REALITY DECLOAKED?

I've just finished an extraordinary interview with Neil Rushton. Neil, for those of you who do not know, is one of the most stimulating bloggers on forteana and folklore out there. His deadbutdreaming blog (<https://deadbutdreaming.wordpress.com>) deserves a place on your favourites bar; certainly, it is on mine.

We covered several fascinating questions in the interview about fairylore. However, for me, the most interesting part of the conversation was when Neil spoke about his experience of Charles Bonnet Syndrome. CBS is found in some people who are losing their sight: "It involves," according to an NHS definition, "seeing things which are not really there... The hallucinations are most marked in low light or when relaxing and are often complicated scenes involving faces, children and wild animals." Some FT readers may have heard of CBS, because the condition has sometimes been used to explain fairy sightings and other phenomena (see **FT125:14, 184:46-49, 321:54-55**). In the last three years, Neil has not only had the trauma of some sight loss, but he also had the hallucinations associated with CBS. He described to me, for instance, how recently "a small, mechanical gnome-like entity" had appeared on the arm of his sofa and told him to relax. Neil can only glimpse these visitors

NEIL TOLD ME THAT A SMALL, MECHANICAL GNOME-LIKE ENTITY HAD APPEARED ON THE ARM OF HIS SOFA

out of his peripheral vision: and conversations seem not to work. But the gnome was more than a wisp of air: "I can't stress how real these communications are – as real as if someone were sitting next to me and talking." Such experiences are common in CBS sufferers and have nothing to do with mental illness. There is, particularly, no external sense of threat. Neil tells me: "I have to admit that I have come to enjoy the unusual nature of the experiences." If you go to a psychiatrist with serious sight loss problems and little men in your peripheral vision you will be sent not to a mental care facility but to an ophthalmologist.

Where Neil would disagree with the doctors is over the word 'hallucination' – for Neil, the gnome-like entity is actually there. Neil argues, in fact, that as he has lost part of his sight, he has paradoxically been able to glimpse things that he could not see before.

But how can a mechanical breakdown in the optic department conjure up 'fairies'? Neil writes: "It seems to me as if a change to the brain can, under certain conditions, allow us to perceive what is usually suppressed in waking reality." In other words, our brain typically cloaks part of existence, and CBS (and other experiences, including, Neil would argue, hallucinogenic drugs and meditation) can 'open the doors of consciousness'. We see things that are always there, but that normally we do not actually register. Discuss!



We need to talk about Frank

PETER BROOKESMITH referees the latest round in the ongoing Pope vs Clarke punch-up

The esteemed David Clarke, in his article on the Rendlesham Affair and 'Frank' the SAS wannabe (**FT376:16-17**), left out a few relevant items, which it is my pleasure to supply to a public thirsty for facts. Of which the pertinent few available about Rendlesham are fast becoming swamped by the febrile imaginings of semi-professional fantasists. So...

As it happens, Dr Clarke let me in on Frank's attempt at humour about a fortnight after he himself had it. It's much to the point that Frank's communication was timed to land on Dr Clarke's desk on 1 April – that deserved better prominence than a footnote. He actually picked it up on 2 April because, as he wrote to me, "I rarely check my work pigeonhole – fearing it might contain work." So it goes, Frank. Better luck next time.

Apart from this glaring clue, there's much else in Frank's tale that stinks to anyone with any military experience or knowledge. But anyway: for the avoidance of doubt and speculation, I bothered both Kevin Conde (he who played the prank with his patrol car's lights, though he wasn't sure it was on any of the "nights in question"), and Col Sam Morgan, who followed Col Ted Conrad as Col Halt's immediate superior, for their thoughts on this missive. Kevin Conde – who would have been at the sharp end of any assault, simulated or Spezna – pointed out that the attackers "would not have been interested in the WSA [Weapons Storage Area, a.k.a. the SSA or Secure Storage Area, where nuclear ordnance was reputedly kept]. They would be focused on taking out the aircraft and runways to prevent our aircraft from sortieing" – which makes perfect sense. If what one's read of the Soviet Spezna and their short life expectancy is accurate, they would have come straight down on the runway and around the hangars, not landed in the woods and politely rung the East Gate door bell. Frank, Conde remarks, weaves a "plot that would only work in Hollywood."

Col Sam Morgan confirmed: "There were exercises to test the 81st SP [Security Police] just as there were exercises to test all of the missions on the base. I observed one such exercise for the SP and the UK forces did very well, which was unsettling for me as the 81st SP were under my office. In a nutshell, it looked to me that the UK forces overwhelmed the USAF security forces in short order." A smirk of patriotic *schadenfreude* here is perhaps best suppressed. And so much for being



Dr David Clarke,



nabbed and interrogated by the ARRS; for, as Col Morgan commented, "The 67th ARRS was NOT a Special Forces Unit. It was an Air Rescue and Recovery unit and no more. I was a friend of the Colonel in charge and know what they practised and how they were equipped." And that's without passing comment on the egregiously implausible behaviour of Frank's rude, brutal and patently fictional ARRS lieutenant. Col Morgan added: "I know nothing about the 1980 enhanced base protection devices and I don't believe anything like that could have happened without my knowing about it." So, another bit of this silly Frankish edifice bites the dust.

If all this, along with Col Ted Conrad's commentary in Dr Clarke's article, doesn't

ABOVE: Frank's letter, postmarked 30 March 2015 and timed to arrive on 1 April. LEFT: Dr David Clarke.

put the kybosh for you on Frank's jolly joke, please seek professional help. Those who certainly need professional help are certain 'professional' journalists. More than one daily paper bothered not to report the whole of Dr Clarke's website article, but made it appear as if he was endorsing Frank's overcooked imaginings.

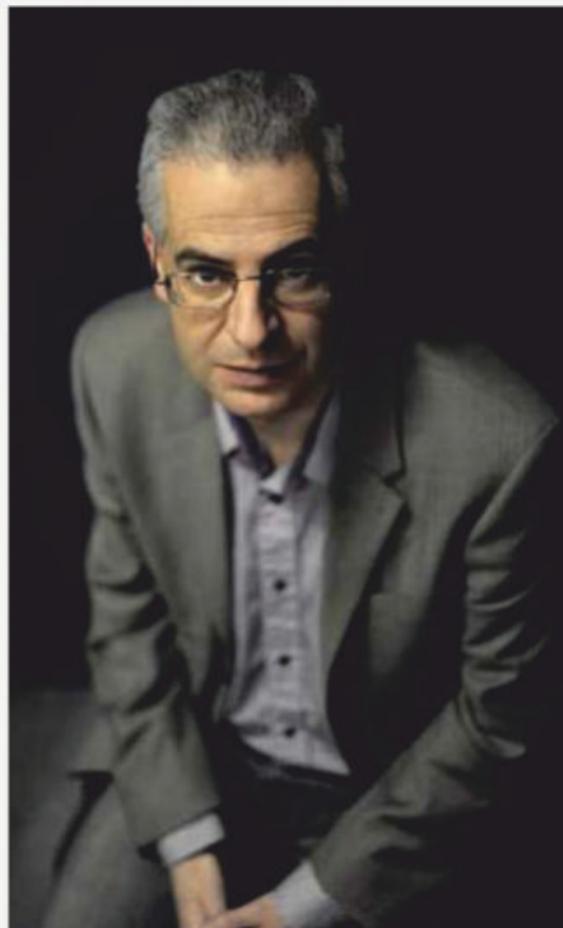
The guilty parties included the *Daily Telegraph*, which certainly should have known better, the *Daily Express* and, wouldn't you know, the *Sun*, which called the USAF Security Police 'Marines' (guaranteed to get up the noses of both) and David Clarke an "alien fanatic". The most startling member of this pack of incompetents was none other than Nick Pope, who these days also describes himself as a journalist. On his Facebook page he called Frank's tale "a classic friend of a friend story, with zero evidence" – okay – but then excelled himself in widening the distance between himself and any recognisable truth, claiming that: "The ufologist concerned is a college lecturer who's previously been accused of plagiarism so the whole story... may simply be a case of a needy, dishonest ufologist trying to write himself into the story." Gratuitous insult, or what?

Just in case you didn't know, David Clarke is an old-time newspaper scribe who did his 'prentice work as a court reporter, as one did in those days, and knows that any good scoop needs two sources for its claims. Suggesting he's a plagiarist verges on the libellous; it's the worst accusation you can level against any journalist. Pope

was too lazy to check the web for Dr Clarke's actual story, but not so lacking in energy that he couldn't go on to maintain: "He's spent years dishonestly trying to position himself as an expert on my old MoD job, and this looks like an attempt to write himself into the Rendlesham Forest story." Dr Clarke does know, as many do, rather more than Pope is prepared to admit about his old (now very old) job. But what his assertion sounds like, besides utter bollocks, is that Pope can't abide *anyone* getting between himself and Rendlesham, about which he's pleased to keep himself misinformed (radiation readings, anyone?) but well in with its fantasist in-crowd of story-shifting 'witnesses', which is how he wrote himself into the story. Mr – or is that Lt Col? – Pope shouldn't judge others by his own self-aggrandising standards. *Anybody* can comment on 'Rendlesham', and many nobodies do; the UK's best-known ufologist and archaeologist of Rendlesham might be expected to report on a prank mailed straight at him.

At least a few people took Pope on. Andy Myers commented pithily: "You appear to have lost your objectivity on Rendlesham. If you read the article on Dr Clarke's website itself you will see that having investigated the claims he has discounted any SAS involvement and gives full reasons why. There was absolutely no need for the character assassination which now brings into question the voracity [sic] of your integrity in these matters." Another one like that and he'll get blocked. And Hayley Stevens tackled Pope on the accusation of plagiarism, which he justified by invoking a dead witness (Georgina Bruni), thus going one better as foatales go than the one he conjured up in his original dig at Dr Clarke. And, of course, Pope continued to ignore the crucial distinction between an accusation and established guilt. Personally, I have long accused Dr Clarke not only of working for MI5 (an ancient canard) but also of having an energetic, indeed athletic, adulterous affair with Princess Diana *at their behest* – will that do?

Hayley Stevens, bless her best cotton socks, didn't let it go at that, and bearded the otherwise beardless Pope by email to justify this charge of plagiarism. He replied: "Bruni *believed* [emphasis added] Clarke had plagiarised some of her work on early Ministry of Defence research into the UFO phenomenon, and that he'd falsely claimed credit for having unearthed several declassified MoD documents she believed she had discovered first... Bruni was researching multiple archives, so may not have acquired the documents from the MoD." All suitably vague, to be sure, like the best bespoke hearsay. When Hayley Stevens asked to be shown the plagiarised work, she says "I was told it no longer existed." (hayleyisaghost.co.uk, blog 25 Jan 2019) The expedient disappearance of the evidence just adds hilarity to Pope's sinking ship of a case. But, to be nice about it, he is being disingenuous.



LEFT: Former MoD UFO desk jockey Nick Pope.

led to the release of the remaining MoD files in 2007/8. Thus, he learned of the existence of the 'Condign Report' and, in 2006, having deployed the FOIA with Gary Anthony, finally got a copy of it (the smile on his face as he turned up with it, hot from the MoD main building, at an FT UnCon was something to behold). Pope was neither present at nor involved in any of this, unless he had acquired a Hobbit-style invisibility cloak, but that didn't stop him cobbling up articles on the back of the massive press coverage it received, citing his position as 'Head of the Government's UFO Project', "a term entirely of his own invention" (MoD briefing, 16 April 2006). Needless to say, he carefully omitted to mention whose labours had had 'Condign' released.

Claiming credit for research, or even relentless cajolery, that one hasn't done is definitely dishonest, but patently Dr Clarke hasn't done that, whosoever else may have done. Even so, it's not plagiarism in the same sense as presenting Toto's 'Africa' as all your own work, should you be so weird as to wish to. But Pope then sinks himself further into the mire by repeating another of his canards, saying "Clarke was just one of numerous ufologists making these sorts of FOI requests, as the MoD files themselves reveal. His claiming credit for release of the files may be more naivety than dishonesty, but either way, it's false, and unfair to all the other ufologists who made UFO-related FOI requests." We've seen what nonsense this is, as the MoD files themselves reveal. Elsewhere Pope has claimed "hundreds" of applications were made for the files in question under – *nota bene* – FOI. This is even more disingenuous, since the Rendlesham papers and others were released under the 1994 'Code of Practice' that preceded the FOI Act (2005). At that time, only Dr Clarke, Joe McGonagle, Gary Anthony and Andy Roberts – acting in concert, and whom Pope described as a "little boys' club that thought they ran ufology in the UK" – were pestering the MoD for this and other material, however many "hundreds" may have done so after 2005.

It's clear then that Dr Clarke is not exactly writing himself into the Rendlesham affair, having been stuck into it for over 20 years. And Pope's rabbitry about 'plagiarism' (which he's been repeating for years and years) is – let's say – ill-founded, tendentious, not even a half-truth. Does this sound 'dishonest' to you? Maybe even a bit 'needy'?

That there ain't no justice remains an eternal truth. And now the wraith of Supreme Commander Jim Moseley appears at my side, whispering, like the slave to the Roman general: "Vanity, vanity... All is vanity... All glory is fleeting... But *ain't ufology grand?*"

For an amusing account of earlier Pope/Clarke bouts, see www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/uk-top-ufo-experts-hate-each-other_n_3568990.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

75

THE BEAST OF GÉVAUDAN

THEO PAIJMANS presents contemporary accounts of the mystery monster that terrorised 18th-century France



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ABOVE: A 1764 drawing of the “monster that afflicts Gévaudan... It prefers to attack women and children. It drinks their blood, cuts their head off, and carries them away.”

Unlike so many monsters, there is ample evidence that the creature that stalked the French province of Gévaudan really did exist. Voluminous records list victims of its deadly attacks. There are detailed eyewitness accounts. It was also probably the first monster in history that received extensive international press coverage during its reign of terror. But what the beast was remains a mystery.

In the last months of 1764 British newspapers reported the activities of a monstrous creature in the province of Gévaudan. It had slain “20 persons, chiefly children, and particularly young girls”. The monster was “much higher than a wolf, low before, and his

“His mouth, which is large, is provided with a set of teeth so very sharp that they have taken off several heads as clean as a razor could have done...”

feet are armed with talons. His hair is reddish, his head large, and the muzzle of it shaped like that of a greyhound; his ears are small and strait, his breast is wide and grey; his back streaked with black; and his mouth, which is large, is provided with a set of teeth so very sharp that they have taken off several heads as clean as a razor could have done. He is of amazing swiftness, but when

he aims at his prey he crouches so close to the ground that he hardly appears to be bigger than a large fox, and at the distance of one or two paces he rises upon his hind legs and springs upon his prey, which he always seizes by the neck or throat. He is afraid of oxen, which he runs away from...”¹

Not a wolf then, it was suggested, but a female hyena or panther, escaped from a

menagerie, perhaps from that of the King of Sardinia.² Meanwhile, in Gévaudan the hunt was on, involving massive numbers of participants, reportedly numbering in the thousands. But the monster remained elusive and seemed invulnerable, as gunshots didn’t harm it.³

In fact, its reign of terror had just begun. Its attacks were ferocious, as eyewitnesses attest: “We perceived the wild beast, so often described, make a jump towards the horses, and on the footman’s erecting his right hand to draw the cutlass and strike the beast, it pricked up its ears, stood on its hind feet, and shewing its teeth full of froth, turned round and gave the fellow a most violent blow

with the swing of its tail. The man's face was all over blood; and then the monster seeing the gentleman in the chaise, who presented a blunderbuss to the neck of the beast, it crept on its fore feet to the chaise-step, and being close to the door, reared upright, vaulted into the inside, and broke through the other side glass, and ran at a great rate to the adjoining wood..."⁴

Occasionally, stories sprang up that it was slain. A beast "supposed to be a hyena" was killed in Limousin,⁵ as well as wolves "of extraordinary size", one measuring five and a half feet in length.⁶ A second unusually large wolf was killed, embalmed and sent to the King.⁷ Between 1764 and 1767, more than a hundred wolves were killed in Gévaudan, half a dozen of which were thought to be the Beast.⁸ But the killing of a 12-year-old girl and a young woman and other subsequent attacks quickly dispelled hopes that the terror was over.

The monster was also extremely swift: "The agility of this mischievous beast is equal to its ferocity. He performs about eight leagues an hour, as has been found out by tracing the course he has made in a day at different places."⁹

By now, the people of Gévaudan were convinced that what they were up against was not a wolf, a panther or a hyena: "It is the size of a very large dog, extremely hairy, of a brown colour, with the belly of a lightish yellow: the head is

very large, and two long teeth stand out from its mouth; the ears are short, and stand up, and the tail bushy, which it erects in running, its legs are very long, and its talons large. In some respects it resembles a bear, in others a boar, and in others neither," a puzzled commentator remarked.¹⁰ The creature also had a habit of disappearing between each attack for a period of eight to 10 days.¹¹

In January 1765, the beast attacked five little boys from the village of Villere. Fortunately, they were armed with sticks with pointed iron blades at the ends and thwarted its attack: "The beast stalked round them two or three times and at last sprung upon one of the little boys. The three biggest poured upon him, and pricked him several times without being able to pierce his skin... He retired about two paces, after having tore off part of the little boys right-cheek, which he eat up before their eyes. Soon after he returned to the attack with new fury, and seizing the least of the children by the arm, carried him off in his mouth." The boys drove the creature off in a nearby marsh.¹²

From 1764 till 1767 audiences in England, Ireland, Scotland, Austria, the Netherlands and in the end, America, were fed fresh stories of the depredations of the French monster on a regular basis. The press speculated about what kind of animal it was,¹³ covered the many

unsuccessful hunting raids,¹⁴ and mentioned the reward offered by the French king.¹⁵ At the same time there were doubts. A Dutch newspaper scoffed: "In regards to the creature that wanders about in Gévaudan and causes so much mischief there, one does not know what to believe, the details told are so improbable that one is almost ashamed to report them..."¹⁶ A British newspaper concluded that its source for the story, the *Paris Journal*, was respectable, as it was run by "men of letters".¹⁷ The *London Magazine* commercially exploited the terror by publishing an illustration, "an exact representation of the ferocious wild beast of the Gévaudan, which has devoured such numbers of persons, and made such ruinous havoc in that country, supposed to be of the hyena kind".¹⁸ Meanwhile the international press kept its readers informed of the ebb and flow of its attacks.¹⁹

The Beast was first said to have been killed in 1865, but in the end its reign only ended in 1767 when it was reportedly shot. Surgeons dissected the carcass and concluded it was more hyena than wolf: "This animal hath 40 teeth and wolves have but 26. The muscles of his neck are very strong; his sides are so formed that he could bend his head to his tail... his tail is very large, broad, thick, and bristled with black hair; the feet are armed with claws extremely strong and singular."²⁰ Tradition has

it that the beast was slain by a custom-made silver bullet. Elsewhere it is believed that the beast disappeared in 1767 after poisoned bait had been used on a large scale.²¹

The Beast had its kin. Something similar briefly stalked the area around the French city of Verdun, in December 1765. "The animals seem to have declared war on mankind in these peaceful times", a newspaper declared. "Only just now the province of the Gévaudan has been freed of the infamous predator, when a new one shows itself in our vicinity. It appeared at 15 November in the morning at eight 'o clock, in front of the gates of Verdun, and in a short time wounded 15 persons, some dangerously, others lightly. Only our hunters understood their skill better than the hunters at Gévaudan..." The creature was killed, but it added another mystery to the list: "Opinions differ as to the nature of the beast. It has more of a fox than a wolf to it..."²²

A similar creature haunted Skipton, North Yorkshire, in 1766. It was reported that "the moors in that neighbourhood, have been infested, for upwards of a year and a half past, with a wild, furious, but anonymous animal, which had destroyed a great number of sheep and lambs, and notwithstanding it has been shot at several times, it still roves triumphant. At first, it used to kill the sheep &c. and eat the flesh of 'em,



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ABOVE: The ferocious Beast claims another victim in this coloured etching from 1764.



Suite des ravages affreux causés par la cruelle Bête du Gévaudan, qui continue de dévorer ce Pays, malgré les poursuites et recherche continue de M^r Denneval et autres fameux Chasseurs.

A Paris chez Mondhare rue St. Jacques à l'Hostel Saumur



Épisode de la Bête, histoire que l'on croit être une Hyène, qui ravage depuis 6 mois le Gévaudan près Langonnet, tous les Loups en plusieurs Lettres partielles ayant annoncé la destruction de ce cruel Animal, mais les nombreux dévastations qu'elle vient de faire nous assure du contraire. Le Roy étant informé des malheurs de ce Monstre envoia M^r Duhaut chasser dans les Vétoiseries de Clermont avec 50 Dragons, ce Monstre est d'une lègèreté étonnante il fait dans une heure un chemin assez franchir les murs les plus élevés. Sa Majesté a ordonné une gratification de 6000 livres pour quiconque le détruirait. Les Etats du Languedoc et les Diocèses de Nantes y ont au roi ajouté une récompense pour celui qui le tuerait. Ce cruel Animal a dévoré beaucoup d'hommes et d'animaux.



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ABOVE: The large wolf – ‘Le Loup de Chazes’ – shot by François Antoine de Beuterne on 21 September 1765, displayed at the court of Louis XV. Beuterne believed that he had killed the infamous Beast of Gévaudan, but the monster’s attacks soon started up again and continued for the next two years.

but it now only sucks their blood; naturalists are divided in their opinion concerning this animal; some will have it a species of the wild beast of Gévaudan; but the knowing ones, with more reason suppose it is a greyhound bitch, which got loose from a gentleman at Burnfall.”²³

Even today the Beast of the Gévaudan casts its shadow in folklore and fiction, as it

gave birth to the belief that a werewolf can be killed by a silver bullet. But the exact identity of the monster remains unresolved. Theories range from a serial killer to a hyena, a panther, a wolf-dog hybrid or a sub-adult male lion.²⁴

It is not even certain there was only one beast of Gévaudan. Some incidents gave weight to an early suggestion that perhaps there was more

than one creature at large. A little girl of the parish of St Privast was said to have been carried off and devoured by “one of those animals”.²⁵ Hunters who shot and wounded the creature claimed to have seen a second one.²⁶ In 1767 an American newspaper noted that “another wild beast” had appeared in the area²⁷ and an English newspaper commented on the return of the “ravenous

wolves”, which had caused much mischief in Gévaudan in 1765 and 1766. This time they “devoured many persons of all ages and of both sexes.”²⁸ Neither was the beast forgotten in England. It no longer terrorised the frightened populace of Gévaudan, but instead it entered satire and even haunted the odd political speech, before finally fading away into history.²⁹

NOTES

1. Derby Mercury, 30 Nov 1764; Ipswich Journal, 8 Dec 1764.

2. Derby Mercury, 30 Nov 1764; Oxford Journal, 8 Dec 1764; Ipswich Journal, 8 Dec 1764; Der Genealogische Archivarius, 1766, p206.

3. Oxford Journal, 8 Dec 1764; Ipswich Journal, 8 Dec 1764.

4. Public Advertiser, 6 Mar 1765.

5. Stamford Mercury, 21 Feb 1765.

6. Aberdeen Press and Journal, 14 Oct 1765; Wiener Zeitung, 16 Oct 1765.

7. The Scots magazine, 7 Oct 1765; Bath Chronicle & Weekly Gazette, 31 Oct

1765.

8. Karl-Hans Taake, “Solving the Mystery of the 18th-Century Killer ‘Beast of Gévaudan’”, blog. nationalgeographic.org, 27 Sept 2016.

9. Oxford Journal, 26 Jan 1765; Oprechte Haerlemsche Courant, 18 May 1765.

10. Derby Mercury, 8 Feb 1765; Ipswich Journal, 16 Feb 1765.

11. Wiener Zeitung, 1 Mai 1765.

12. Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, 28 Feb 1765; Wiener Zeitung, 6 Mar 1765.

13. Aberdeen Press and Journal, 10 Dec 1764; Amsterdamse Courant, 13 Feb 1765.

14. Ipswich Journal, 2 Mar 1765; Wiener Zeitung, 30 Mar 1765; Salisbury and Winchester Journal, 8 Apr 1765; Wiener Zeitung 17 Apr 1765; Salisbury and Winchester Journal, 1 July 1765; Amsterdamse Courant, 27 Aug 1765.

15. Ipswich Journal, 9 Mar 1765; Wiener Zeitung, 20 Mar 1765; Amsterdamse Courant, 5 Mar 1765.

16. Amsterdamse Courant, 12 Mar 1765.

17. Ipswich Journal, 20 Apr 1765. The French were irritated by British incredulity, as Abbe Oliver’s letter to Dr Maty, Secretary of the Royal Society, makes clear: “At London you would not believe in our wild beast of the Gévaudan; but engraved ludicrous prints

of it for your amusement, while we suffered under its devastation. Why should we treat your giants any better than you our wild beast.” Caledonian Mercury, 29 June 1767.

18. Salisbury and Winchester Journal, 10 June 1765.

19. Aberdeen Press and Journal, 15 July, 16 Sept 1765; Amsterdamse Courant, 1 May 1766.

20. Derby Mercury, 25 Oct 1765.

21. Karl-Hans Taake, op. cit.

22. Amsterdamse Courant, 9 Jan 1766; Wiener Zeitung, 18 Jan 1766.

23. Leeds Intelligencer, 8 July 1766.

24. Karl-Hans Taake, *The Gévaudan Tragedy: The*

Disastrous Campaign of a Deported ‘Beast’, 2015.

25. Amsterdamse Courant, 1 May 1766; Dublin Courier, 12 May 1766.

26. Public Advertiser, 29 May 1765.

27. Virginia Gazette, Williamsburg, VA, 17 Dec 1767

28. Bath Chronicle, 21

29. See Public Advertiser, 25 Apr 1767; Salisbury and Winchester Journal, 27 June 1768; Kentish Gazette, 1 Nov 1769.

See also FT14:14, 104:14 and Michel Meurger, “A Hyena for the Gévaudan: Testimoial Reports and Cultural Stereotypes”, *Fortean Studies*, Vol. 4, 1998, pp219-229.

THE BLACK KNIGHT SATELLITE

Is a 13,000-year-old alien space probe keeping a watchful eye on humanity from Earth orbit? **BRIAN J ROBB** disassembles a tale of Tesla radio messages, astronaut saucer sightings, confused media reportage, and a NASA thermal blanket that got away...

Anyone fascinated by the arrival of the mysterious ‘Oumuamua, a bizarre interstellar object first seen crossing our Solar System in 2017 (pictured at right; see FT362:24, 363:13, 374:14), might also be curious about a somewhat nearer-to-Earth mystery object known as the Black Knight satellite. Whether a figment of the imagination, a natural object inflated to conspiratorial proportions, or an actual extraterrestrial space probe located in Earth orbit, it could have a more immediate and noticeable impact than the just-passing-through ‘Oumuamua.

There are reportedly over 10,000 artificial man-made satellites currently in Earth orbit, many of them now space junk – bits and pieces of older spacecraft, as well as non-defunct satellites. About 3,000 of these objects are presumed to be operational satellites delivering such mundane things as television signals and Sat Nav data. However, some say that there are more things in orbit than the general population might imagine... Enter the Black Knight satellite.

The Black Knight satellite conspiracy theory is an object lesson in how such ‘theories’ are constructed, often built from unrelated facts, misreported ‘news’ stories, misinterpreted scientific reports or observations, and sheer mischievous promotion of fringe beliefs through smoke and mirrors into the mainstream. It shows how more recent ideas can be projected backwards into history to draw in key figures (Tesla! NASA!) to give the story more legitimacy, and it reveals how well-meaning attempts to correct such misinterpretations can be used to further the myth being built. Most often, this is not a conscious process organised by a secretive cabal but a symptom of the will to believe, no matter how outlandish the story... especially in the Internet age.

In the UFO conspiracy world, the Black Knight satellite is not really any kind of satellite in the way the term is popularly understood – a man-made object in space – but is instead said to be an alien space probe



“I have a deep conviction that intelligent beings exist on Mars”

located in Earth’s polar orbit and understood to have been here for some 13,000 years. Of course, NASA is actively engaged in a cover-up to hide the ‘truth’ from the population of Earth. To understand where this story came from, it is first necessary to look at it in some depth.

THE KNIGHT WHO SAYS ‘BEEP’

According to believers, Nikola Tesla was the first to ‘discover’ the Black Knight satellite – for what is a conspiracy theory if it does not include the famed Serbian electrical engineer and inventor? The story goes that during his 1899 wireless power experiments at his Colorado Springs ‘experimental station’ (see FT217:32-39, 363:30-37) Tesla made contact with Martians. Quoted in the *Albany Telegraph* in 1923, Tesla recalled: “While experimenting, I obtained extraordinary evidence of the existence of life on Mars. I had perfected a wireless receiver of extraordinary sensitiveness,

far beyond anything known, and I caught signals which I interpreted as meaning ‘1, 2, 3, 4’. I believe the Martians used numbers for communication because numbers are universal. I have a deep conviction that highly intelligent beings exist on Mars.”

Tesla pondered the meaning of the signals he’d received and came to a definite conclusion. “It was some time afterward when the thought flashed upon my mind that the disturbances I had observed might be due to an intelligent control. Although I could not decipher their

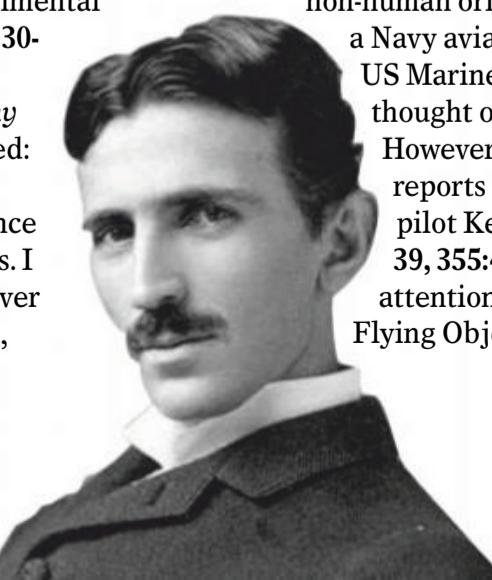
meaning, it was impossible for me to think of them as having been entirely accidental. The feeling is constantly growing on me that I had been the first to hear the greeting of one planet to another.” It’s impossible to know what Tesla actually received at this remove, but his vagueness was sufficient for his tale of alien communication to be folded into the later Black Knight satellite narrative.

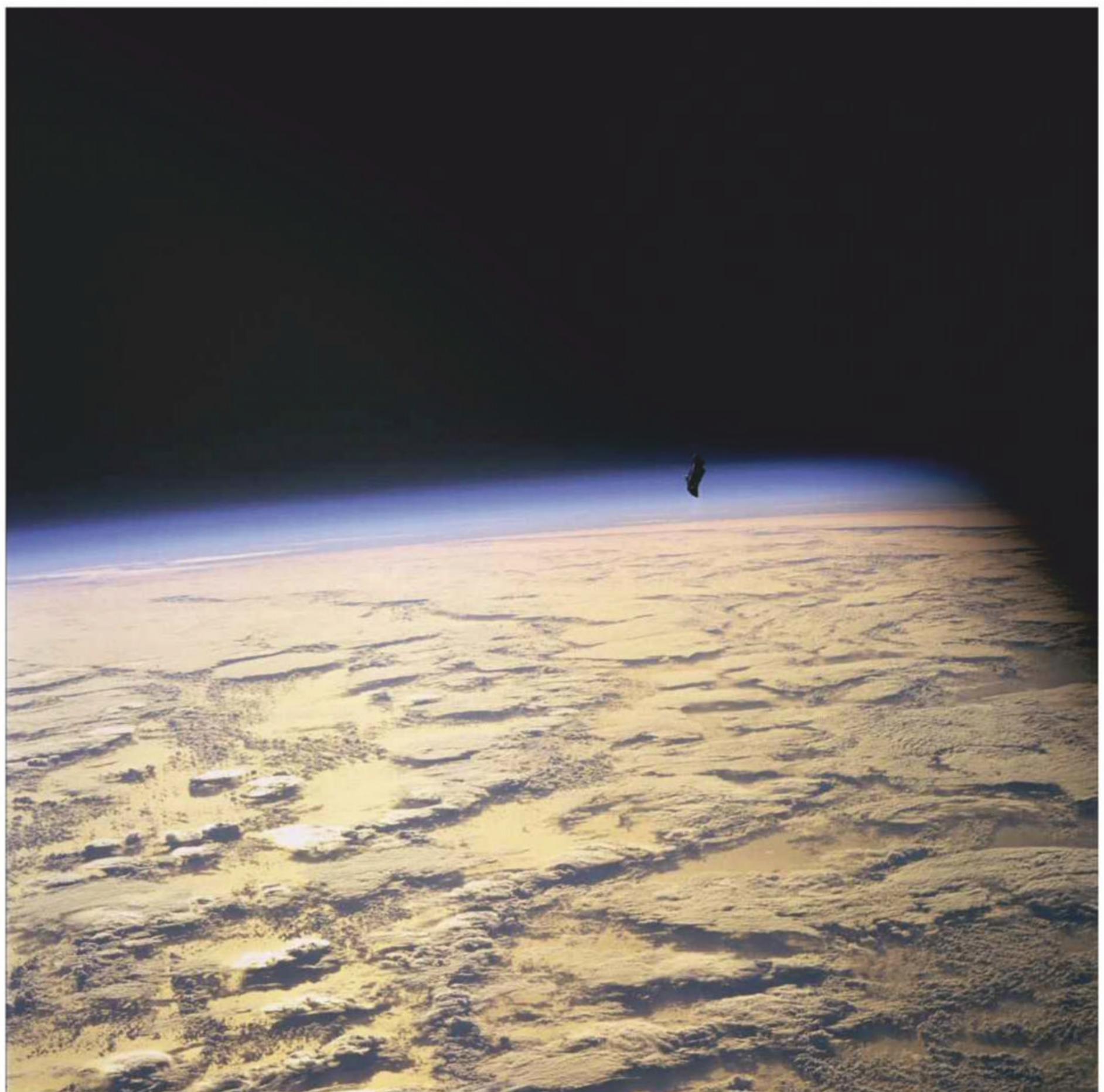
The next claim for communication from the satellite is attached to a 1927 report from Norwegian engineer Jørgen Hals. Experimenting with radio signals in a manner similar to Tesla, Hals claimed his signals were bounced back to him after a few seconds’ delay – a phenomenon that became known as Long Delay Echoes (LDEs). It is over 90 years since Hals made this discovery and still there is no widely accepted scientific explanation for the phenomenon – so why not attribute it to a mysterious alien artefact parked in Earth orbit?

In 1954, before any satellites originating upon Earth had been (officially) launched, UFO researcher Donald Keyhoe claimed that the United States Air Force had detected at least two anomalous artificial objects orbiting the Earth that were of non-human origin. Keyhoe had been

a Navy aviator who’d served in the US Marine Corps, so was initially thought of as a straight arrow.

However, in the wake of the 1947 reports of ‘flying saucers’ from pilot Kenneth Arnold (FT137:34-39, 355:46-49), Keyhoe turned his attention to so-called Unidentified Flying Objects. Initially sceptical of





ABOVE: NASA photo STS088-724-66, taken from the Space Shuttle *Endeavour*, appeared to offer the first visual evidence for the hypothetical 'dark satellite'. FACING PAGE TOP: The mysterious 'Oumuamua, which fuelled speculation about alien probes visiting our Solar System. FACING PAGE BOTTOM: Nikola Tesla.

an alien origin, Keyhoe changed his mind, largely due to contradictory or evasive information from the US Government, US Air Force, and the Pentagon on the subject.

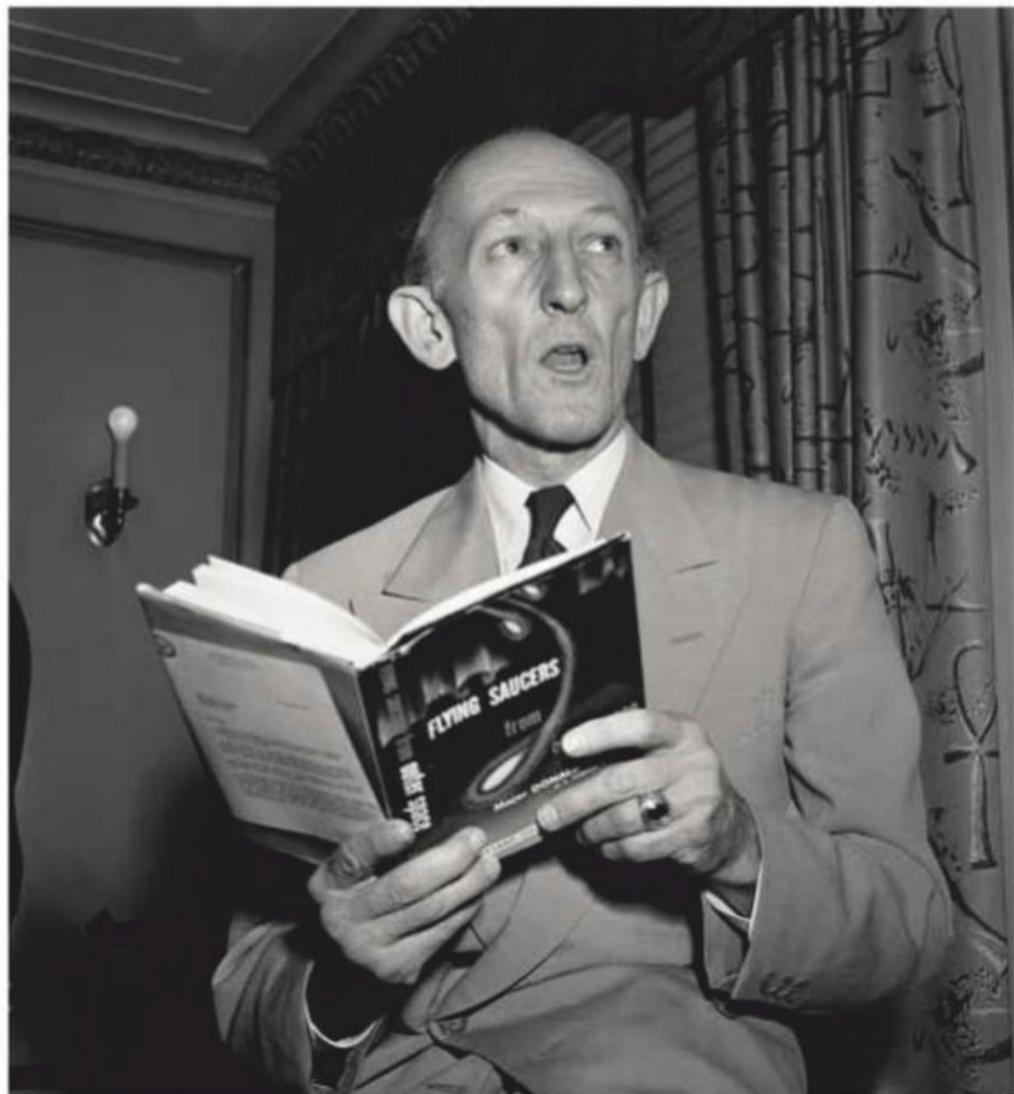
Keyhoe was converted into a believer, seeing the evidence of the capabilities of UFOs as described by witnesses and reported in the media as confirmation of extraterrestrial intelligence. He was equally convinced that the US Government was out to suppress reports of such activity. Extrapolated from an article originally published in *True* magazine, Keyhoe's 1950 book *The Flying Saucers Are Real* made the argument for the extraterrestrial hypothesis – the idea that flying saucers were piloted

by beings from another world. Could such beings have planted a probe in Earth orbit – maybe a refuelling point or a social hub for the aliens? Score another win for the slowly growing story of the Black Knight satellite.

Some of the reports Keyhoe may have drawn on appeared in *Aviation Week* magazine and came from the University of New Mexico's Dr Lincoln LaPaz and astronomer Clyde Tombaugh (famously the discoverer of occasional planet Pluto). The pair had sighted something in orbit that might have been an unknown satellite. Both men were reportedly working on secret projects for the Office of Ordinance Research.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Where did the name 'Black Knight' originate? Well, you could blame Nigel Kneale's *Bernard Quatermass*, or at least his real-life equivalents. Between 1958 and 1965, the Royal Aircraft Establishment – the real-world version of Quatermass's British Rocket Group – designed and launched a ballistic missile known as the Black Knight rocket, based on the older Blue Streak missile. The first was launched from Woomera in Australia in September 1958, and it was intended to double up as both a ballistic missile and a possible launch vehicle for boosting scientific objects into Earth orbit. By 1964, the 'Black Knight' satellite launch



KEYSTONE PICTURES USA / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE LEFT: Retired Marine Corps major Donald Keyhoe, photographed in 1953 promoting his book *Flying Saucers from Outer Space*. ABOVE RIGHT: Preparations for the test flight of the ballistic 'Black Knight' rocket at Woomera, Australia, 1958.

programme' was a priority for the UK's Ministry of Defence, although nothing was ever actually successfully put into space. It did, however, have one lasting legacy: it gave its name to the overarching Black Knight satellite mythology.

No less an authority than *Time* magazine was next to jump on the bandwagon when, in the early 1960s, it reported the presence of an unknown object – a “mysterious ‘dark’ satellite” – in polar orbit around the Earth. This was an orbital path unused by international satellites, with all US and Soviet satellites located in an Equatorial orbit. In the typical Cold War terms of the period, *Time* noted: “There was nervous speculation that it might be a surveillance satellite launched by the Russians, and it brought an uneasy sensation that the US did not know what was going on over its own head.”

Ever since the 1957 launch of the Russian Sputnik satellite, America had been terrified of falling behind its global rival. The race was on not only to put a man into space (another first claimed by the Russians) but also to send a manned ship to land on the Moon. If neither the Russians nor the US laid claim to the mysterious polar orbiting anomaly, might it not be the same “dark satellite” that had been trying to communicate with both Tesla and Hals?

If Donald Keyhoe was not considered a suitable authority, how about an honest-to-goodness NASA spaceman? In 1963, Mercury-Atlas 9 astronaut Gordon Cooper

Astronaut Gordon Cooper reported the sighting of an anomalous object

(youngest of the Project Mercury astronauts, and reputedly the first man to sleep in space) reported the sighting of an anomalous object during his 15th (and final) orbit of the Earth while over Perth, Australia. The claim goes that Cooper saw ‘green lights’ and that these were undoubtedly further evidence of the existence of the Black Knight Satellite, tucked away in Earth orbit, coyly winking at passing astronauts. It was also said that ground-based radar at the Muchea Tracking Station, just outside Perth, picked up an anomalous object at the same time as Cooper’s sighting.

By the 1970s, speculation had turned to the age of the mysterious thing orbiting Earth. In *Spaceflight Magazine* in 1973, Duncan Lunan decided to explore the subject of LDEs, which he noted “had been first reported in the 1920s”. Lunan set out to follow up “the idea of Prof. Ronald Bracewell, of Stanford University, that a probe from another civilisation might have tried to contact us by radio in the 1920s and

been responsible for the effect called long-delayed radio echoes.” A so-called ‘Bracewell Probe’ is posited to be an information-packed, unmanned craft launched by aliens and intended to contact other life in the Universe (rather like the *Voyager* probes of the 1970s).

Lunan tracked down the original 1920s paper on LDEs published in *Nature*. The echo timings appeared random, but following a suggestion from Bracewell that the first message from any alien probe might be a map to its origin, Lunan interpreted the original 1920s reported signals as “a set of star map coordinates”. He was amazed when “to my astonishment I found what appeared to be a readable message, giving Epsilon Boötis as the origin star of the spacecraft, and its arrival date as 11,000 BC”. The date was worked out by the position of Arcturus, the brightest star of the Epsilon Boötis system, as described in the ‘star map’.

A scientific paper planned by Lunan on this revelation was mentioned in a lecture by his academic referee AT Lawton that in turn led to a sensational front-page story in the *Sunday Telegraph* just days before Christmas 1972. Lunan noted that the subsequent evolution of the story in the media was “worthy of Gilbert and Sullivan: for example, a completely accurate account of it appeared in the US *National Enquirer*, whereas *Time* magazine got it wrong and never printed a promised correction.” When the actual paper appeared in *Spaceflight*, the magazine of the British Interplanetary

Society, in April 1973 under the title "Space Probe from Epsilon Boötis", the wider media reaction was more muted. However, this was another vital building block in the Black Knight Satellite myth: the probe had now been 'proven' to be at least 13,000 years old... even though Lunan never actually made any reference to Black Knight.

For the better part of two decades the Black Knight satellite controversy went dormant. After all, there was enough exciting UFO activity closer to home (that is, the Earth) to keep believers busy rather than worrying about something out in space that no one was ever likely to actually see – if it even existed. Late in the 1990s, however, everything changed when (of all organisations) NASA finally produced an image of the long speculated about satellite.

The first photographic evidence for the existence of the purely hypothetical Black Knight came from the Space Shuttle Endeavor (STS-88). The main reason for this flight was to initiate construction of the International Space Station, but it was an infamous photo taken during the flight that gave new life to an old story. Taken on 11 December 1998 at 20:17 GMT with a Hasselblad camera, NASA photo STS088-724-66 clearly showed an elongated black object in orbit around the Earth, at that point somewhere just off the southern tip of Africa. Although clearly labelled by NASA as 'space debris', the photo kicked new life into the Black Knight satellite conspiracy theory: here was an actual image of the alien probe that had come to Earth from Epsilon Boötis 13,000 years ago and had reached out to mankind through radio communication in the 1920s, when humans first discovered such technology.

DISARMING THE BLACK KNIGHT

Almost every element that makes up the overall story of the Black Knight satellite has a reasonable explanation, and where there is none as yet (as with LDEs) it is an area being worked on. Of course, whether these explanations are accepted or simply used as new fuel for the conspiracy fire depends upon how tightly believers are wearing their tinfoil hats.

The oldest aspects of the story are those involving Tesla and Hals and their ruminations over long delay echoes. Whereas Tesla seems to have jumped straight to Martians as the answer (and this may have been intended as little more than a provocation; perhaps he was trolling his critics), Norwegian engineer Jørgen Hals was the first to put some scientific weight behind the existence of LDEs. Unfortunately, even today there is no widely accepted explanation for the phenomenon – although there are a lot of competing theories.

All sorts of natural explanations for the phenomenon of LDEs have been put forward over the decades since the 1920s, but the most widely accepted are five key hypotheses. The first is perhaps the one that most obviously springs to mind: radio signals



ABOVE: Duncan Lunan, whose 1973 exploration of mysterious Long Delay Echoes fuelled the emerging myth of the Black Knight satellite. BELOW: Astronaut and sometime UFO witness Gordon Cooper.

reflected off the magnetosphere (where radio waves become trapped and are reflected) or the ionosphere, essentially the planet's upper atmosphere; the further north a transmitting station is, the longer the delay in the signals being reflected back. However, the signal delays attributed to this explanation are too short to count as proper LDEs.

Similar, but better matching the nature of LDEs, is the idea that radio signals travel many times around the planet, becoming trapped between ionised layers of the atmosphere before being bounced back to Earth and received as echoes. All of this

happens in seconds, with experiments suggesting that a 10-second delay between transmission and receipt of an echo could see a signal cross the Earth up to 65 times.

Other explanations involve signals encountering plasma waves in the upper ionosphere; reflection from plasma clouds originating from the Sun, but entering our atmosphere; and, finally, signals encountering each other, combining and then bouncing back. More outré ideas include radio signals bouncing off the Moon, auroras and solar storms being responsible, or (and this is a serious proposition) the alien probe explanation – such as the Black Knight satellite – that was embraced by Lunan and others, including Sverre Holm of the University of Oslo, who lists an alien probe as one possible reason for LDEs. The jury, needless to say, is still very much out on this one.

Another explanation put forward for Tesla's claims of receiving unknown transmissions is pulsars, unknown until the late 1960s. A pulsar is a highly magnetised rotating neutron star that emits a beam of electromagnetic radiation; it could have been this that Tesla – perhaps even further ahead of his time than he knew – was picking up in an era when the existence of pulsars was not even suspected. The first pulsar was pinned down in 1967, when observed pulsing signals were deemed not to be of man-made origin.

During 1954, when Donald Keyhoe made his claims about the unidentified satellites orbiting Earth, he was promoting another UFO book, *Flying Saucers from Outer Space* (1953), so his tall tales have often been interpreted as part of the promotional ballyhoo. Despite having the support of philosopher Carl Jung for his extraterrestrial hypothesis, Keyhoe had his detractors too, among them Captain Edward





NASA

ABOVE: Astronaut Jerry Ross, STS-88 mission specialist, is pictured during a space walk; it was on one of these that a thermal blanket drifted away from the Shuttle. BELOW: An enlargement of the 'Black Knight'.

J Ruppelt, the first head of the Project Blue Book US Air Force study of UFOs between 1952 and 1969, who did not dispute his facts or reportage but merely his interpretation. As for Dr LaPaz and Pluto promulgator Clyde Tombaugh, both retracted their claims in the face of an official explanation that the objects spotted were natural (a claim Tombaugh went out of his way not to endorse). Maybe they'd been got at by the 'deep state'?

Then there's the *Time* magazine story reporting the mystery satellites detected by the US. This was shot down almost as soon as it was published, with *Time* following up the story mere weeks later, reporting that "last week the Department of Defense proudly announced that the satellite had been identified. It was a space derelict, the remains of an Air Force Discoverer satellite that had gone astray." Later declassified documents revealed this was in fact the remains of an Air Force Discoverer VIII satellite that had been lost, part of the Corona spy satellite programme. Corona was a plan to use apparently civilian launched satellites to spy on the USSR by photographing remote sites of military interest. This was just two years before the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Cold War was



heating up. It is understood that during the abort phase of the mission the Discoverer jettisoned its film recovery capsule, a large piece of kit known as the 'bucket', and it was this that was detected and reported as being an anomalous satellite in Earth orbit. *Time* had also offered an alternative story that the mysterious object was a retro rocket from Discoverer's launch gone astray and unnoticed in orbit for five months... Of course, the Black Knight satellite brigade's

response to this explanation is "They would say that, wouldn't they?", automatically assuming any official explanation for the *Time* report was part of an officially sanctioned cover-up.

NASA DROPS A BLANKET

As for astronaut Gordon Cooper, he'd blotted his copybook somewhat with repeated, regular reports of UFO sightings even before his space career. His first claim of a sighting came in 1951, when he was flying over West Germany. In 1957, aged 30, Cooper was working as part of the Experimental Flight Test Engineering Division at Edwards Air Force Base when he reported a "strange, saucer-like aircraft" that flew by silently. This 'saucer' hovered over Cooper and several others, before flying off. Cooper claimed to have taken photographs that were later confiscated by the Pentagon. Until his death in 2004, aged 77, Cooper maintained that US authorities were covering up the existence of flying saucers, citing the hundreds of reports made by professional pilots as evidence that something unknown was in the skies. Unfortunately, official documentation, such as NASA transcripts of his mission or even Cooper's own copies of official papers, do not record any reported UFO sighting made during the flight of Mercury-Atlas 9, despite what the astronaut himself later claimed. Needless to say, there was also no record of any ground-based radar tracking of the supposed object. Again, this one runs up against the 'official cover-up' explanation from the Black Knights.

Duncan Lunan's 1973 article in *Spaceflight* magazine did so much inadvertently to help the claims of the Black Knight believers that he later felt the need to distance himself from them. He says he discovered that the original 1920s data on LDEs he was working from "weren't accurate, and that facts I had deduced about the Epsilon Boötis system were incorrect, so I withdrew the [paper]". Lunan has since gone to great lengths to claim he had nothing whatsoever to do with the Black Knight conspiracy theory, noting "much media interest and numerous web sites print only spurious stories about me, building on the misreporting of the Epsilon Boötis story in the 1970s". His detailed account debunks Cooper's reported sighting, takes on the origin of the name Black Knight in the 1950s British rocket programme, and covers the Corona spy satellite cases. He concludes: "Nevertheless it's now claimed on numerous web sites, without asking me, that I translated signals from 'Black Knight' and that it was [a] probe." For the Black Knight gang, Lunan has clearly been 'got at' by the powers that be, who want to keep the population in the dark.

Finally, we have the infamous photo from Shuttle STS-88 – NASA themselves revealed proof that there was 'something' unknown out there in Earth orbit, so it had to be the Black Knight satellite. A mundane explanation for what was photographed



ABOVE: Another photo taken on Shuttle mission STS-88 seemed to confirm that something dark and mysterious was orbiting the Earth – but was it the Black Knight satellite or just a rogue thermal blanket that had broken loose from the International Space Station?

came from the astronauts involved: the item captured on film floating in space was nothing more than a thermal blanket accidentally jettisoned by the craft. Space journalist James Oberg interviewed the crew, during which Shuttle astronaut Jerry Ross explained what had happened. During a space walk that involved wrapping components on an ISS node in thermal blankets to prevent heat loss through the exposed metal, one of the blankets was accidentally cast adrift. The moment was captured on video as others within the Shuttle looked on and discussed a retrieval manoeuvre. Ultimately, that wasn't pursued, and the thermal blanket was photographed as it drifted away from the Shuttle. It fell out of orbit about a week later, burning up in the Earth's atmosphere.

In one stroke, the only actual photographic evidence for the otherwise imaginary Black Knight satellite was debunked – although believers would point to this after-the-fact explanation as being yet another cover-up to explain away the accidental release of the damning photograph. One thing the Shuttle photo does point up is that apart from that photo, there is next to no evidence at all for the existence of a Black Knight (or any other) unknown satellite of alien origin in Earth orbit. All is merely inference: a

confluence of gossip, misunderstood science, misinterpreted Cold War paranoia, and a damn-the-facts need to 'believe' among the wilder fringes of the Internet.

All that would seem to put the cap on the legend of the Black Knight satellite, a confection of urban legend, wishful thinking, and paranoid speculation. And yet... There have been secret Cold War space satellite programmes, run by both the US and the USSR (as well as other ambitious states). In 2011, two previously clandestine American satellite programmes were revealed in the form of the Gambit and Hexagon spy satellites (both follow ups to Corona) that had been tasked with surveillance missions over Soviet Russia and her satellite states. In 2015, the American Government released details of a project dubbed the Manned Orbiting Laboratory (MOL) that ran from 1963 to 1969, costing \$1.5 billion. Although it never actually put a crew into space, MOL – codenamed Project Dorian – developed an extremely sophisticated photographic system, while it also expanded to cover radar projects, electronic intelligence gathering, and 'negation missiles', a theoretical concept in which missiles launched from a space platform would shoot down enemy nuclear warheads (long in advance of 'Star Wars', either on the big screen or as a metaphor

for a military space programme). The Black Knight satellite conspiracy believers are at least correct in their claims that secrets are kept about both US and Russian (and now Chinese) activities in space and near-Earth orbit.

Perhaps the rise of private space programmes, such as Elon Musk's SpaceX and Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin, as well as promises of 'space tourism', such as those made by Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic, will reveal once and for all whether the Black Knight satellite exists. Perhaps some unwitting space tourist will return with the photographic proof that has been sought for all these decades. Or perhaps the ominous arrival of 'Oumuamua in our Solar System is simply that of the latest vehicle to voyage here from the Epsilon Bootis system. Maybe the Black Knight satellite needs a tune up and 'Oumuamua has come to fix it? If so, expect those bizarre radio signals detected by Tesla and Hals over 100 years ago to resume shortly...

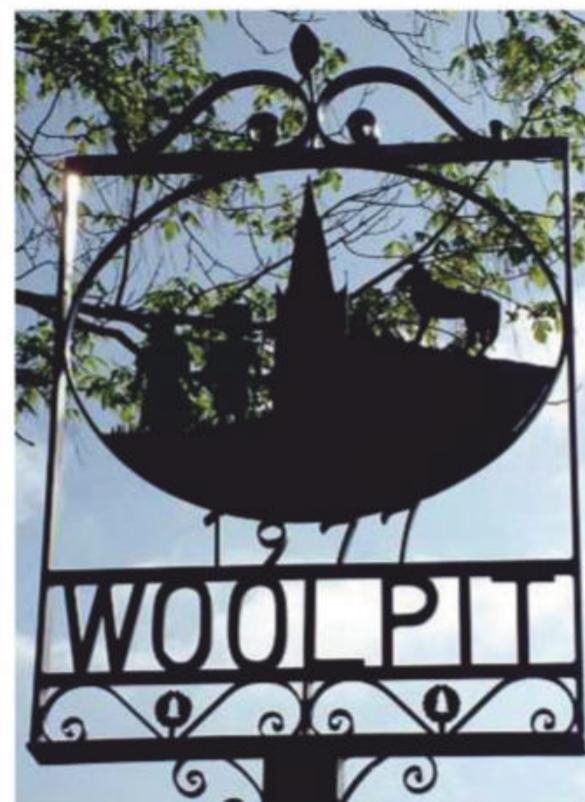
◆ **BRIAN J ROBB** is a regular contributor to *FT* and a New York Times best-selling author whose books include *Counterfeit Worlds: Philip K Dick on Film, Screams & Nightmares: The Films of Wes Craven, and Timeless Adventures: How Doctor Who Conquered TV*.

OF MEDIÆVAL VAMPIRES AND OTHER WONDERS

The Green Children of Woolpit and the Orford Wild Man are just two of the better-known fortean favourites to be found in the works of the mediæval historians Ralph of Coggeshall and William of Newburgh. **CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE** digs deeper and comes up with more ‘wonder tales’ featuring entombed toads and dogs, fairy pranksters and the walking dead.

The tale of the Green Children of Woolpit is a well-known fortean favourite (see FT57:39, 41; 222:54-55).¹ Sometime in the 12th century, a boy and a girl with green-tinged skin are supposed to have appeared near the mouth of a pit in Woolpit, a Suffolk village about seven miles (11km) east of Bury St Edmunds. Their speech was incomprehensible, and they were unwilling to eat anything other than beans. Later, asked where they had come from, the girl described a land where everyone and everything bore the same green colour. It lay in perpetual twilight and was called by its inhabitants St Martin’s Land. This fantastical story is recorded in the chronicles of two mediæval historians – William of Newburgh (c.1136-c.1198?) and Ralph of Coggeshall (fl. 1207-c.1226). William, an Augustinian canon from Bridlington in Yorkshire, was the author of *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* (*History of English Affairs*), which covered the period between 1066 and 1198. It is divided into five books, Book One being an account of the troubled reign of King Stephen, a period of civil war known as The Anarchy. Whilst most of the *Historia* describes verifiable, historical events, a scattering of its chapters are concerned with “certain prodigies” – the green children being but one of several such wonders.

William begins his version of the green children story by stating that at first he was doubtful as to its veracity and “deemed it ridiculous to give credit to a circumstance on no rational foundation.” Nevertheless, after hearing numerous testimonies, he was “overwhelmed by the weight of so many and such competent witnesses,” such that he was “compelled to believe.”² And he concludes with an invitation for readers to make up



The children were unwilling to eat anything other than beans

their own minds:

“Let every one say as he pleases, and reason on such matters according to his abilities; I feel no regret at having recorded an event so prodigious and miraculous.”³

William therefore displays an admirably fortean attitude; initially sceptical, he is forced to reconsider after hearing the

LEFT: The village sign of Woolpit, showing the two green children.

testimony of those he considers to be reliable witnesses. Note also that he doesn’t make any claims of absolute truth or falsity, but merely says that *he* was compelled to believe.

Ralph was the sixth Abbot of Coggeshall, a Cistercian abbey in Essex, about 32 miles (50km) south of Woolpit. He was a contributing author⁴ of the Abbey’s *Chronicon Anglicanum* (*Chronicle of England*), which describes events that took place between the Conquest and 1223, and is our other source for the green children story.

WONDER TALES

Also of interest to forteans are its four ‘wonder tales’, which follow an account of preparations for the Fourth Crusade (the history of which is the *Chronicon*’s main subject). These four undated episodes appear together with two others, concerned with heresy and piety respectively.

It has been suggested that Ralph’s interest in “the wonderful, the prodigious and the marvellous”⁵ evinced by these six tales, which he inserts into an account of the Crusade, is indicative of societal fears regarding religious heresy and orthodoxy during this period. Ralph’s order, the Cistercians, had for most of its own history been at the forefront of the fight against heresy in the South of France and elsewhere. Indeed, at the time Ralph was writing, the Albigensian Crusades were declared in 1208, and the Fourth Lateran Council pronounced against heresy in 1215.

Each tale is concerned with the human body, whether abnormal, heretical or



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ABOVE LEFT: Orford Castle, where according to Ralph of Coggeshall, the “wild man” was imprisoned for six months. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The ‘merman’ commemorated on a local restaurant sign. **BELLOW:** A wild man carving on the base of the font in St Bartholomew’s Church, Orford (for more carved Suffolk wildmen, see FT318:28-33).

miraculous. In writing about these bizarre and unusual bodies, Ralph may be seen as offering his readers a metaphor. The Christian Church (the ‘Body of Christ’) is perceived to be embattled, its orthodoxy under threat, whether from heretics at home or Saracens in the Holy Land.

THE WILD MAN OF ORFORD

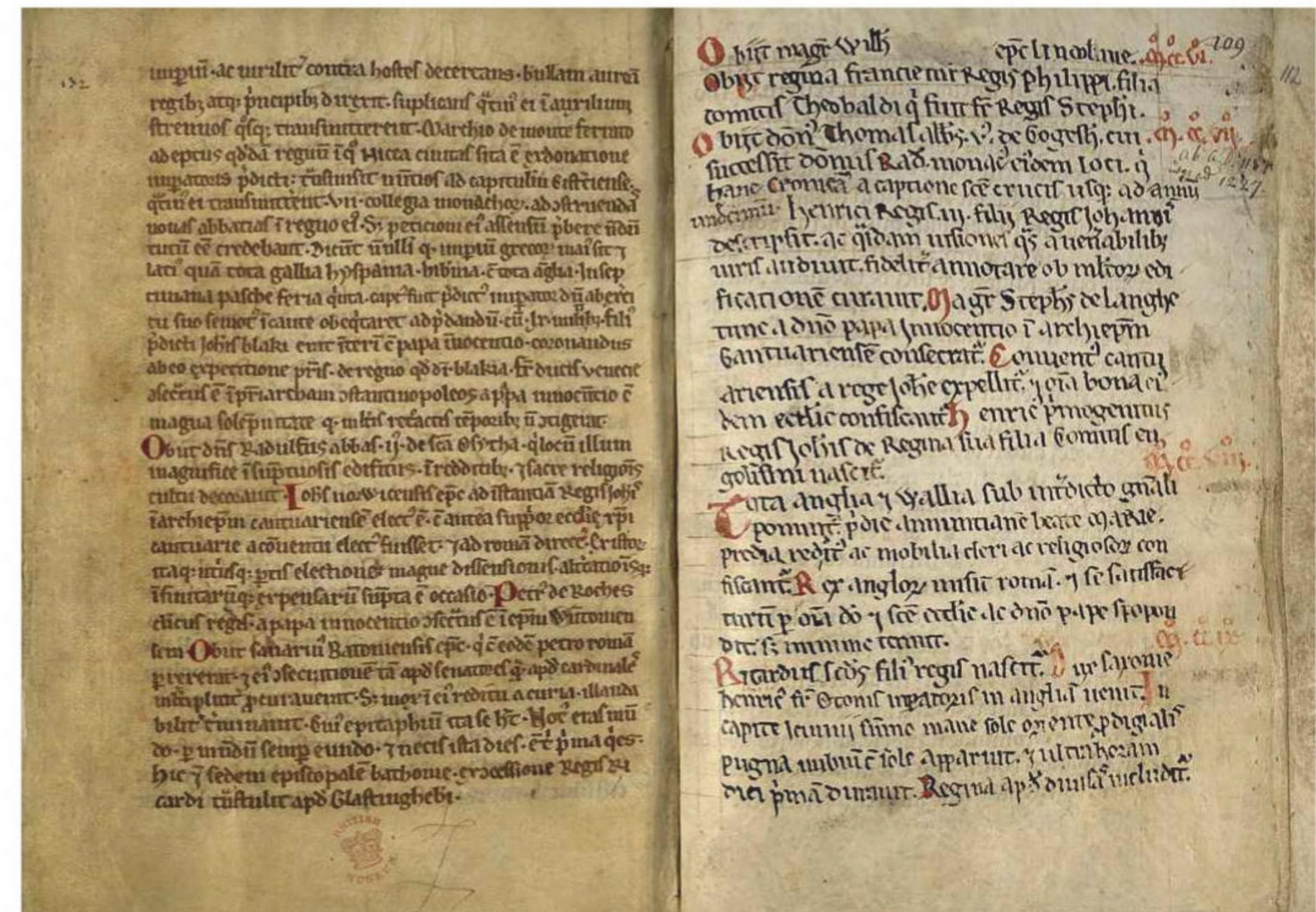
Ralph’s first wonder tale is another staple of ‘mysterious Britain’ compendia, gazetteers and part-work magazines from the 1970s onwards. It concerns a “wild man” captured by fishermen in the sea near Orford, Suffolk. Like the green children, the wild man (or merman) has an outlandish appearance, being naked, covered in hair, with a shaggy chest and long pointed beard. Again, like the Woolpit children, he was unable to speak English, and was very hungry; unlike the children, however, the wild man eagerly ate anything that was put before him: “He preferred raw fish to cooked; but when they were raw he squeezed them tightly in his hands until all the moisture was pressed out, and so he ate them.”⁶

Highlighting the theme of heresy, and further underlining the wild man’s other-ness in relation to 12th-century England, when taken inside a church “he showed no sign of reverence or even of belief, either by kneeling or bowing his head at the sight of anything sacred.”⁷

Eventually, after two months’ captivity, the wild man escaped to the sea and was never seen again. “But whether he was a mortal man,” writes Ralph, “or a kind of fish bearing a resemblance to humanity, or an evil spirit lurking in the body of a drowned man... it is difficult to decide, all the more so because one hears of so many remarkable things, and there is such a number of happenings like this.”⁸ Apparently, such remarkable occurrences as the wild man’s visit to Orford were not unique.



GEOGRAPH / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



ABOVE: Pages from Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum*. BELOW: A decorated page from William of Newburgh's *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*.

GIANTS AND FAIRIES

The tale is followed by that of Woolpit's green children, after which comes a chapter headed 'On Giant Teeth.' Ralph describes having seen and handled two enormous teeth, which had been found on the Essex seashore and taken to his abbey. A giant rib was also found at the same location, most likely the remains of an elephant or another large prehistoric mammal. However, Ralph sees these teeth as evidence for giants, which, he claims, have been sighted in Wales, but with a fiery twist. He writes of: "a young man of immense stature, whose height was five cubits [7ft 6in or 2.3m]... In the same province, in the same year, in a grassy plain there appeared human footprints of extraordinary length, and wherever these footprints had been pressed down, the grass remained scorched, as if by fire."⁹

Ralph's fourth 'wonder story' tells of a spirit named Malekin who haunted Dagworth Castle in Suffolk, four miles (6km) from Woolpit, during King Richard I's reign. Malekin, or Malkin, being a diminutive form of Matilda or Maud, she is understood to have been a girl.

Mostly invisible, and speaking in the voice of a one-year-old child, with a local accent ("secundum idioma regionis illius" – according to the idiom of that region),¹⁰ Malekin would take food that was left

Malekin said she had once been a human child and was abducted



out for her, and played various tricks and pranks on people – in particular, revealing their secrets. On the rare occasions that she revealed herself, Malekin manifested as a small child dressed in a white tunic. There are evidently some similarities with the Isle of Man's Gef the Talking Mongoose (see FT269:32-40), South Wales's Pwca Trwyn, and other cases of mischievous entities throughout the British Isles and elsewhere, often categorised as house fairies or poltergeists.

Malekin said that she had once been a human child and had been abducted from a field; she would remain in this form for seven years, after which she would return to live with her own people. As a result, the tale has often been understood in terms of fairies and changelings.

Chapter XXVIII in Book One of William's *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* is headed 'Of Certain Prodigies'. It contains William's account of an "extraordinary event... which I have known from my childhood" that had taken place in his home county of Yorkshire.¹¹ Like the green children, and Ralph's Malekin, it contains aspects reminiscent of fairy encounters.

A villager, returning home "a little intoxicated, late at night", hears the sounds of "singing and revelling" from a nearby hillock ("which I have often seen, and

which is distant from the village only a few furlongs.”¹² Investigating, he finds an open door in the hillside and, looking in, sees a house filled with men and women seated “as it were, at a solemn banquet.” He is offered a cup but wisely chooses not to drink, running off with it after pouring its contents onto the ground. He is pursued by the company, but manages to throw them off thanks to the swiftness of his horse. The cup, it is said, was a vessel “of an unknown material, unusual colour, and strange form.”¹³ It was afterwards offered as a gift to King Henry I of England, passed to David, King of Scotland, then back to Henry II.

THE TOAD WITH THE GOLDEN CHAIN

Also in this chapter we find some classic forteana: the living animal found inside a rock or stone. A “vast rock... in a certain quarry” is split, to reveal two dogs, “filling up the cavity of the rock which contained them”. They are “of that species which are called harriers, but of fierce countenance, disagreeable smell, and without hair”.¹⁴

Like the green children, one of the dogs soon died, but another, “having a most ravenous appetite, was for many days fondled by Henry, bishop of Winchester.”¹⁵

In another quarry, William writes, was found a “beautiful double stone, that is... two stones joined with some adhesive matter.”¹⁶ The stone was shown to a nearby bishop, who ordered it to be split, and was found to be home to a toad wearing a small golden chain around its neck. However, the bishop, somewhat lacking in the spirit of scientific enquiry, ordered the stone to be sealed once more, thrown back into the quarry and covered with rubbish so that it might never again be discovered.

In total, William’s *Historia* contains over 20 reports of supernatural or fantastic occurrences. For instance: a vision of the “banner of the Lord, conspicuous by its milky whiteness, and joined to it the figure of a man crucified”¹⁷ is seen by numerous witnesses in the skies above Dunstable. A portion of the sky is seen to blaze with an unnatural redness on three separate occasions, all of which coincide with Richard I’s 14-month captivity on the continent.

A study of mediæval histories regards it as notable that a “sober and high-minded Christian historian” such as William should devote so many pages to accounts of “Ethiopian demons and talking skulls and vampires.”¹⁸ Especially so, given that in his preface, William criticises Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* (‘History of the Kings of Britain’) for its “ridiculous fictions,”¹⁹ and for having added “much from his own invention.”²⁰ Only those persons “ignorant of ancient history,” he blasts, “can for a moment doubt how impertinently and impudently he falsifies in every respect.”²¹

The difference, as William sees it, between himself and Geoffrey, is that while he himself relies on witness testimony, Geoffrey (c.1095



ABOVE: The Mediæval Dead: A detail from the English De Lisle Psalter (c.1308–c.1340) showing ‘the three living and the three dead’.

-c.1155), writing about events that took place hundreds of years ago, simply took the prophecies of Merlin to be faithful accounts of ancient British history.

THE WALKING DEAD

William’s *Historia* presents us with four accounts of dead persons rising from their graves and terrorising the living. Although he does not use the term ‘vampire’²², it is hard for the modern reader to avoid this comparison, since all four of these revenants are found to be abnormally full of blood. However, William makes no suggestion that they are bloodsuckers, feeding off their victims. The profusion of blood in their supposedly long-dead corpses is simply an indicator of their unnatural, undead status.

All four of these creatures supposedly manifested in the year 1197. The first appeared at Melrose Abbey in the Scottish border country. In life, the ‘vampire’ was a notable lady’s chaplain, whose interests were overly secular; he was a keen huntsman, so much so that he was nicknamed ‘Hundeprest’ (dog priest). He was buried in the Abbey, but often rose from his grave at night and would appear in his former lady’s bedchamber to distress her “with loud groans and horrible murmurs.”²³ Four monks decided to keep watch over the grave; when three of them departed, the ‘Hundeprest’ rose from his grave, but the remaining monk had the presence of mind to strike him a blow with an axe. When they later examined the corpse, it was seen to bear a severe wound. They then removed the body and burnt it, scattering the ashes to the winds.

William’s second revenant incident was said to have taken place at Buckingham; the day after his death, the ‘vampire’ appeared again to sexually assault his former wife and terrorise family members, neighbours and domestic animals. Terrified and exhausted through nightly vigils,

the villagers approached Stephen, the Archdeacon of Buckingham (who, William claims, subsequently related the story to him). Stephen sent a report to the Bishop of Lincoln. Some of the Bishop’s advisers counselled that: “Such things often happened in England and [are] explained with the aid of many examples that the people could not have peace unless the body of the wretched man were disinterred and cremated.”²⁴

But cremation, in destroying the corporeal form and preventing its resurrection, was regarded with such horror in Christian terms that the Bishop instead “ordered that the grave was to be opened and the absolution [scroll] placed on the breast and the grave closed again.”²⁵ This evidently proved effective, as the ‘vampire’ was not seen in the village again.

In William’s other two cases, Berwick and Castle Anantis, the fear of contagion is an additional factor. Contagion is an integral feature of the modern vampire myth – being bitten by a vampire will turn you into one – but in William’s accounts, the fear is simply that such creatures spread disease.

The Berwick entity was, in life, a wealthy man who led a sinful life. After his death, he returned from the grave, his corpse “borne hither and thither, pursued by a pack of dogs with noisy barkings; thus striking great terror into the neighbours, and returning to his tomb before daylight”.²⁶ Fearing that corrupted air from the decaying corpse would generate disease, 10 bold young men dug up, dismembered and cremated the cadaver, thus putting an end to its activities.

A man of bad reputation married a woman belonging to the Anantis castle household. (Anantis castle has not been identified, although Alnwick in Northumbria or Annan in Dumfriesshire are candidates.) He suspected her of adultery, so spied on her from a vantage point up in

the beams of their marriage chamber. Sure enough, his fears were confirmed, but in his rage and dismay the man fell to the ground, fatally injuring himself. So preoccupied was he by his injuries and his wife's adultery that he refused to confess his sins. Although buried, his body was subsequently seen wandering the streets, filling "every house with disease and death by its pestiferous breath".²⁷

Many townspeople succumbed to the plague; others fled. Eventually, two brothers, whose father had succumbed to the plague, decided to take action. "Let us dig up this baneful pest, and burn it with fire," they swore.²⁸ Digging up the corpse, they found it "swollen to an enormous corpulence, with its countenance beyond measure turgid and suffused with blood".²⁹ They removed its heart and burned the body, which brought an end to the foul, corrupted air that had brought the plague to the town.

SOCIAL MONSTERS

What is the significance of the year 1197, when all four revenants are said to have manifested? (Ralph's group of wonder tales, the wild man of Orford, the green children, the giant teeth and bones, the spirit-child Malekin, are also believed to have been written at this time, between 1196 and 1198). During their lives, all four had led dissolute, impious and unchristian lives, so their post-death status is a form of punishment. Their sin is contagious, and capable of

engendering disease.

The previous year had seen famine and renewed war between England's Richard I and France's Philip II. Steep price rises and heavy taxation to fund the war all added to the apocalyptic mood, with another civil war only just having been averted in 1194. Furthermore, disease was widespread throughout England, with so many dying each day that "even the healthy began to despond, and went about with pallid and cadaverous countenances, as if on the point of death".³⁰

William also encourages the reader to connect the revenants' activities with that of William Fitz Osbert, who led a popular uprising of the London poor the previous year, making a last stand in St Mary-le-Bow church; he was afterwards rumoured to have confessed to having sex with his mistress on the altar, and to have called upon the Devil as the besieging forces closed in on him.

1197 had also seen the death of William Longchamp, one-time Bishop of Ely, who had effectively been placed in charge of England while King Richard was away fighting in the Holy Land. A native of Normandy who spoke no English, Longchamp was unpopular due to his autocratic behaviour, and because he nearly led the country into civil war. As chief justice, chancellor and bishop, he was likened by his contemporary, the historian Gerald of Wales, to a "monster with many heads"³¹ and "more like an ape than a man".³² Making the link with disease,

William said of Longchamp that he had been "vomited forth as some pestilent humour."³³

As we have seen with the story of the 'Hundepreste', William had a particular dislike of clerics who behaved in too worldly a fashion, seeing this as an affront to the social order. And in upsetting the social order, these two figures were 'social revenants' or 'social monsters.'³⁴

Mediæval theories of the Universe saw a relationship between macrocosm and microcosm, but not simply 'as above, so below'. The physical and moral realms were also connected, with natural order being a manifestation of the oneness of God. Therefore, any deviation from the natural order, like green children, wild men, spirits or the walking dead, signified spiritual and social uncertainty. Threats to the social order were paralleled by threats to the spiritual order; resurgences of heresy made plain such fears. Both William and Ralph, as clerics, were well aware of the dangers of heresy.

MIRACLES VS MARVELS

Neither Ralph nor William offer explanations for the mysterious and wondrous events they describe; but both emphasise the credibility of witness testimony. These things *did* occur, but how or why is beyond our understanding. William insisted that: "The nature of those green children, who sprang from the earth, is too abstruse for the weakness of our abilities to fathom."³⁵



ABOVE: William of Newburgh recorded four manifestations of the walking dead in this year, the first at Melrose Abbey in the Scottish border country. Here, an overly worldly chaplain known as the 'Hundeprest' would rise from the grave "with loud groans and horrible murmurs."



ABOVE: William Longchamp seen arresting the Bishop of Durham at Tickhill castle, 1190. Longchamp was notoriously autocratic and described by Gerald of Wales as a “monster with many heads”.

This notion – that the human mind is unable to comprehend or explain certain phenomena – is echoed by a remark made by a contemporary of William and Ralph’s, the lawyer and writer Gervase of Tilbury. He drew a distinction between *miracula* (miracles) and *mirabilia* (marvels); the former are supernatural events that may only be attributed to God’s power (such as the virgin birth, or Lazarus being raised from the dead), whereas the latter, whilst being natural, defy human intellect.

Similarly, William defined *mira* as those things for which an explanation is concealed (“occultam habent rationem”). Magicians and evil angels are capable of producing *mira*, whereas true *miracula* are reserved for God alone.

The monstrous or marvellous could be regarded as natural on the basis that, while being rare, such occurrences did not go against the natural order. In Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*, it is argued that while angels can perform acts outside of corporeal nature, a true miracle is that which is done outside the whole created order of all

nature; therefore only God is able to work miracles.³⁶

William insisted that the wonders he relates had not merely been unusual phenomena: “I call things of this nature wonderful, not merely on account of their rarity, but because some latent meaning is attached to them.”³⁷

But their nature being *mirum* rather than *miraculum*, this did not mean that no explanation or significance might ever be found. Augustine of Hippo wrote: “the name ‘monster,’ we are told, evidently comes from *monstrando* (showing), because they show by signifying something.”³⁸ If the perceived world and its constituent phenomena constituted a text, or, better still, a text in an unknown script, it was up to the perceptive reader to interpret or decode it.

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NOTES

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2 Joseph Stevenson (ed. and trans.), *The History of William of Newburgh ; translated from the original Latin with a preface and notes by Joseph Stevenson; a facsimile reprint of the edition of MDCCCLVI*, Llanerch Publishers, 1996, p436.

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5 Elizabeth Freeman, ‘Wonders, Prodigies and Marvels: Unusual Bodies and the Fear of Heresy in Ralph of Coggeshall’s *Chronicon Anglicanum*’, *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 26, no.2, 2000, p128.

6 Katharine Briggs, *A Dictionary of Fairies*, Penguin, 1977, p313.

7 Ibid., p313.

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9 www.jasoncolavito.com/blog/ralph-of-coggeshall-and-the-english-giants.

10 Joseph Stevenson, (ed.), *Radulphi de Coggeshall: Chronicon Anglicanum*, Longman & Co., 1875, p121.

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28 Ibid., p661.

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32 Austin Lane Poole, *Domesday Book to Magna Carta, 1087-1216*, Clarendon, 1955, pp352-353.

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36 Summa, Part One, Question 110, Article Four.

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CARRY ON DON'T FOLLOW THAT KEMAL

As the neo-Caliphate's conspiracy-mad President Erdogan plots to resurrect the vanished Ottoman Empire, SD TUCKER explores the anti-Semitic fantasies and media clampdowns that have marked Turkey under his rule.

NAME: UST AKIL, SPECIALIST SUBJECT: CONSPIRACY

Following its defeat in the First World War, Turkey was a nation in chaos, the proverbial 'Sick Man of Europe' – if indeed it really is in Europe at all, which it isn't. One man who devoutly wished it was, however, was Mustafa Kemal, who led the nation to military triumph during the Turkish War of Independence which followed on from the humiliating dismantling of the Ottoman Empire enforced by 1920's Treaty of Sèvres. This ultimately allowed victorious Britain and France to carve the once Turkish-dominated Middle East up between them into somewhat fictional countries with partly straight-edged borders now known by names like Syria and Iraq. Turkey may have lost an Empire, but in Kemal it gained a new hero – he was rechristened 'Ataturk', or 'Father of the Turkish Nation' – with the official founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. A staunch secularist moderniser, Ataturk and his 'Kemalist' fans dragged the Orient into the Occident whether it liked it or not, seeking to purge the perceived 'backwardness' of Islam from public life.

And so things remained for almost a century, with the Turkish military repeatedly intervening to prevent Islamists regaining control of the land until, in 2001, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his AKP Party won election, claiming to be democratic moderates, but in reality taking inspiration from the old regional legend of the Trojan Horse. Initially, the AKP won the support of many secularists and left-wingers suspicious of continued military influence by promising to embrace economic liberalism, political centrism and the prospect of future EU membership – a kind of middle-of-the-road Christian Democrat-style prospectus without any Christianity; but as the years went by it became increasingly clear that Kemalist Turkey had accidentally voted for Christmas.

Erdogan and his Islamist ilk would dearly like to reconstruct the Old Ottoman Empire robbed from their ancestors by the Allies, an Empire once so strong that its armies had reached the gates of Vienna. How could such an incredible military

entity have been defeated by mere *kuffar* troops, though? Surely there must have been some kind of cunning, all-encompassing conspiracy against it? And, if so, then why should that conspiracy not still continue today? In a paranoid 2014 speech, President Erdogan coined the now popular term *Ust Akil*, meaning 'Master-Mind' or 'Supreme Intellect', using it to refer to some sinister Blofeld-like individual or SPECTRE-like cabal supposedly behind all modern Turkey's woes, of whatever kind... especially those which, to the uninformed eye, might have appeared to be down to Erdogan's own poor policy decisions.

The Master-Mind's Master-Plan was to simultaneously mobilise all of Turkey's natural enemies – from Kurdish terrorists and Freemasons, to Israel, Greece, Armenia, Iran and followers of Erdogan's arch-enemy the exiled cleric Fethullah Gulen – and use them to destroy the country, dismembering it as completely as the Ottoman Empire had once been torn asunder. Erdogan's idea of the Master-Mind led to an orgy of public mass-debation all across Turkey, tapping as

it did into the traditional national psychosis of 'Sèvres Syndrome', the local equivalent of the 'Stab in the Back' legend which had once helped Hitler achieve power by claiming Jews were behind the harsh terms imposed upon post-WWI Germany in the Treaty of Versailles. It is not only Islamists who think like this; Kemalists and others have in the past spoken of the stolen Empire being betrayed by conspirators, with one of Erdogan's predecessors as Turkish leader, Turgut Ozal, saying that "there is no need to give names" to the chief perpetrators of these "nefarious actions" as "everybody knows them" anyway. One of Turgut's successors later helpfully provided more clarity on this issue by referring to Sèvres as "The Great Israel Project"; which was very far-sighted of the Zionists as Israel didn't even exist back then. Exploiting such sentiments, Erdogan has often held rallies on the anniversaries of Ottoman defeats of historical enemies like Byzantium, hoping to subliminally remind his countrymen they have come under assault from menacing outside forces and survived before.¹



ABOVE: Secularist moderniser Kemal Ataturk putting on the Ritz; Recip Erdogan fighting the 'Master-Mind'.



BULENT KILIC / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ORIGINS OF THE SPECIOUS

To Turkish slippages like Erdogan and the AKP, the most useful thing about this *Ust Akil* theory is that it is so amorphously protean it can be applied to just about anyone the Islamists either don't like or find it useful to persecute – even including former allies like Fethullah Gulen, or such long-dead historical figures as Charles Darwin. What does Darwin have to do with conspiracies? Well, don't you know that he was Jewish? Sure, the history books may say that he was the son of a CofE clergyman, but we all know who runs the publishing industry, don't we? They certainly don't run it in Turkey these days, apparently, where a cheap print-run of Hitler's anti-Semitic Bible *Mein Kampf* sold over 50,000 copies in two months when republished in 2005, playing on fears that the then ongoing US-led invasion of Iraq was the beginning of a new Crusade against Islam by Christians hypnotically controlled by Jews.²

Turks could be forgiven for this misunderstanding, at least if they had viewed a documentary produced to tie in with Erdogan's *Ust Akil* speech aired in 2015 on the AKP-allied TV channel A Haber, entitled *The Master-Mind*. It opens with an image of the Star of David, then cuts to Erdogan giving his speech, which concludes with him asking who precisely this Master-Mind is. "It is for you to research this," Erdogan answers. If you couldn't be bothered, though, A Haber were happy to do it all for you. Apparently, the Turks' eternal enemy and "the curse of the entire world" – he "who rules, burns, destroys, starves, creates wars, organises revolutions and coups, establishes states within states" – is none other than, as Goebbels might have put it, the Eternal Jew. According to the narrator, Judaism is not a religion but a political philosophy, aimed solely at allowing the Jews to recover the sacred lost Ark of the Covenant. An AKP-friendly professor whose research tallied with the findings of that other respected documentary film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is then wheeled on to claim that the Jews used the Americans, specifically the Zionist-duped Indiana Bush, to invade Iraq in search of this Ark, which they thought might have been hidden within Abu Ghraib (then a museum but later turned into a notoriously abusive military prison, perhaps because the invaders were annoyed that the Ark wasn't there). Other AKP stooges then pop up to link this clearly Jewish Master-Mind to the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. One of these talking heads specifically says that in his 2014 speech Erdogan was doing his best to bring all this out into the open in light of recent suspicious mass protests against his regime. This film was then circulated online by the AKP on its own websites, so they can hardly try and distance themselves from it.³



ABOVE: A Pro-Erdogan supporter holds up a banner attacking US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen during a rally against the military in Istanbul in July 2016. BELOW: Charles "big nose" Darwin, well known Jewish conspirator.

"DARWIN HATED HIS BIG NOSE AND PROMINENT FOREHEAD"

One of the main minions of the Master-Mind unmasked on-screen (who must thus be considered a *Very Elder of Zion*) was Charles Darwin. The idea is that the 'Jew' Darwin came up with his theory of evolution to provide his fellow Zionists with justification for their shadowy domination over all other races. According to this blatant misrepresentation, Jews teach that everyone else evolved from monkeys, but they were fashioned directly by God, thus making them superior beings. However, as the columnist and reputed physician Seyfi Sahin wrote in a 2016 column in the pro-AKP radical Islamist newspaper *Vahdet*, the reverse was in fact true, and monkeys had devolved from deviant Jews whom Allah had cursed to give birth to sub-humans with microcephaly who had since degenerated into "miserable monkeys" – ideas for which Sahin cited direct Koranic justification. As a doctor, Sahin claims to have researched

such pin-headed ape-babies, declaring that they "must be kept under strict control".

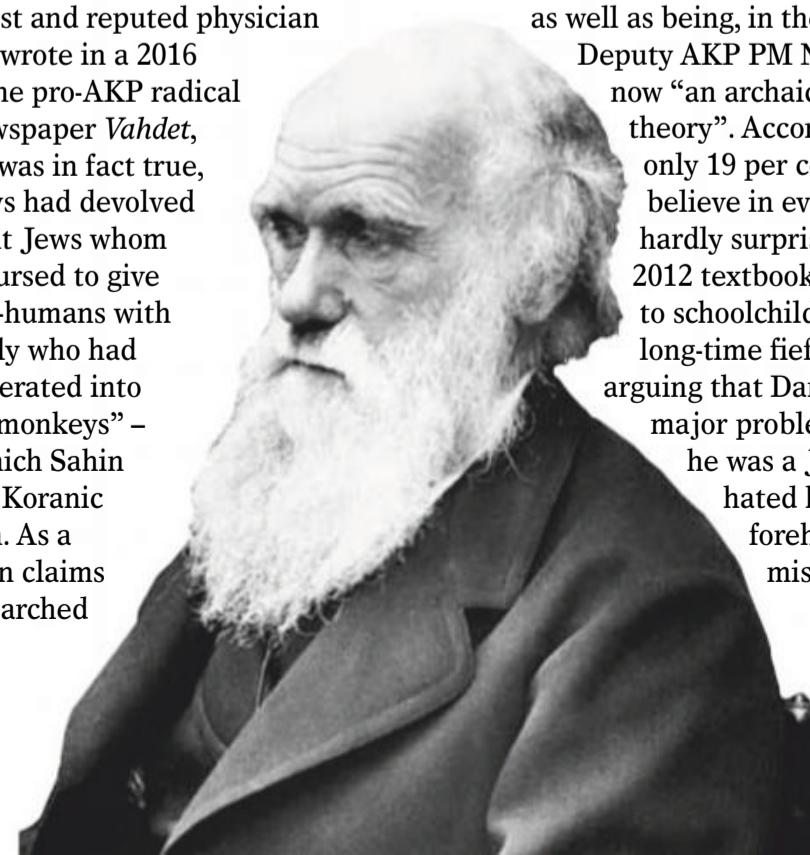
"I believe that the gorillas and chimps living today in the forests of Africa are cursed Jews," says Dr Sahin, "perverted humans that have mutated" through disobeying Allah's will. This should have been obvious. However, Jews were now "so well organised" that they "terrorise the world of science", enforcing belief in Darwinism and leading people to turn from Islam to atheism, thus making them ripe for exploitation and control. Pious Muslims had access to the Koranic truth, but "the Muslims... do not have banks, money or organisation inside the world of science" and so were being defeated in this evolutionary propaganda war.

But no more! At least not in Turkey where, as part of Erdogan's desire to raise a "pious generation" and not a secular Kemalist one, Darwinism has been largely struck from the curriculum as it was "too complicated"

as well as being, in the 2017 words of

Deputy AKP PM Numan Kurtulmus, now "an archaic and disproven theory". According to one survey, only 19 per cent of Turks believe in evolution, which is hardly surprising given that in 2012 textbooks were distributed to schoolchildren in Erdogan's long-time fiefdom of Istanbul arguing that Darwin had two major problems in life: "First, he was a Jew; second, he hated his prominent forehead, big nose and misshapen teeth."

Continued on p50





MAGIC CARPET BRIDES

Is the arrest of Turkey's alleged Sultan of Swinging just President Erdogan's latest trial by media?

In July 2018, Istanbul police raided the fortified hilltop compound of a flamboyant televangelist and High Priest of the Conspirisphere named Adnan Oktar – aka ‘My Master’, ‘Sultan’ or ‘Big Brother Adnan’ – notorious for presenting a constant stream of cable-shows and live webcasts in which he spread the word about Islam by sitting around in the company of a sizable harem of scantily-clad, Gucci-wearing, surgically-enhanced young women dubbed his ‘kittens’, discussing peace, love and the existence of unusual fossils. He also possessed a gang of white-toothed, perma-tanned male singers called his ‘lions’, but Oktar was definitely the alpha male of the pack. If you happen to be an academic or biologist, then chances are you may know of him too, as he has spent over a decade posting out thousands of free copies of his lavishly produced book *The Atlas of Creation* to anyone he thinks might read it [Yes, he even sent a copy to FT – Ed.], including UN diplomats, in the hope of persuading the whole world that Charles Darwin was one damned, dirty ape-lover. The book was so powerfully written, it purportedly made US rapper Busta Rhymes convert to Islam. According to one promo video, Oktar’s campaign has now been so successful that “only 10 per cent of Europeans still believe in Darwinism”.

Written under the pseudonym ‘Harun Yahya’, the multi-volume text is about 800 pages long, but handily is by all accounts highly repetitive, modelling itself more on the structure of Blackpool Rock than Jurassic shale: whatever page you happen to open it on, you are likely to chance upon a variation of the sentiment that ‘If evolution’s real, then how come these old fossils of jellyfish look just like living jellyfish today, but hard?’ To Oktar, there are no such things as intermediate fossils. In his own words: “A 100-million-year-old crocodile, it didn’t transform into a professor after a while.” Oktar has offered a reward of 10 trillion Turkish lira (£7.50) to anyone who can provide him with evidence he is wrong. The *Atlas* has been described as being “absurdly ridiculous”, “pathetically inadequate” and “a load of crap” by some of its less devout recipients, with Richard Dawkins (whose website Oktar successfully had blocked in Turkey, before suing him for libel) saying that Oktar “doesn’t know anything about what he’s trying to refute”. As one photo of a ‘fossilised’ caddis fly in the text actually shows a plastic fishing-tackle item, *complete with attached hook*, this assessment may possess some merit.



The recent brush with mass extinction of Oktar’s own movement might have had more to do with politics than science, for Oktar further uses his media empire to spread his own conspiracy theories. His idea is that cunning materialists have devised a nefarious plot to turn Turks into atheists via Darwinist doctrine, causing them to devolve into consumerists or Communists and thus become “like animals”. Herbert Spencer’s ‘survival of the fittest’ notion, he has said, is responsible for terrorism, racism, Marxism and Nazism – Hitler, Mao, Lenin, Stalin, Pol Pot, Mussolini, all were really “Darwinist Dictators”. In the spirit of interfaith co-operation, he has allowed Jewish and Christian Creationists onto his show to agree with him. According to outrageous allegations dismissed by Turkey’s Court of Appeal in 2010, he has even tried to get other scholars – and potentially useful politicians – on board by sending his sex kittens out to seduce them in honey traps, filming them further enthusiastically propagating the species together and then using the resultant undercover nature-film footage to blackmail them with.

The worst materialists of all are the British Crown. Oktar has set up an entire anti-BBC website – www.bbc.refuted.com – charging the broadcaster with pushing pro-evolutionary propaganda in science shows like *Horizon*, and of “generally act[ing] in line with emotions aroused by the fact that Darwin was British.” To Oktar, the world is secretly run by the “British Deep State”, a shadowy cabal of 300 persons including Queen Elizabeth II and the Pope (who, of course, hails from Argentina, unless he really is Jim Bowen in a white dress).

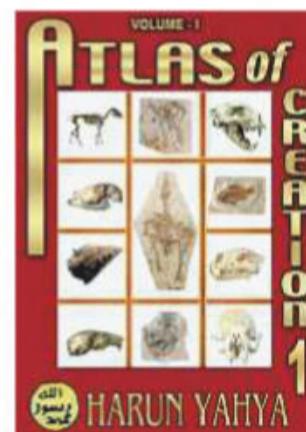
LEFT: The arrest of Anti-Darwinist author, Islamic televangelist and Sultan of Bling, Adnan Oktar. He also goes by Harun Yahya, author of the *Atlas of Creation*.

When arrested, Oktar told reporters: “It’s a British plot!” before being carted off. A pro-government newspaper reported that, in custody, the televangelist advanced the belief that he was being framed because “the British Queen sent a delegation to the President to kindly ask for an operation targeting [me]”, presumably due to his exposure of Darwin. Oktar expressed surprise at this development, as he was a confirmed supporter of Turkey’s Islamist President Erdogan, of the similarly Darwin-dissing ruling AKP Party, and had sent his kittens out onto the streets waving Turkish flags in the great man’s support on the night of 2016’s abortive military coup, arguing that anti-AKP rebels actually approve of the President, they “just aren’t aware of it”. Adnan had been known to praise this same “immaculate Anatolian man” on TV as being “one of the most important figures for the End Times”, who should be allowed to rule until the (imminent) end of the world, as well as vigorously supporting the AKP’s aim of reconstructing a neo-Ottoman Empire called ‘The Turkish-Islamic Union’. Erdogan had even once been photographed holding a copy of Oktar’s *Atlas* following a speech, so why else would he have betrayed The Master?

Well, Oktar, Erdogan and the AKP would all deny this, but according to allegations made by the Turkish investigative journalist Fatih Altayli, whom Oktar has sued

several times, when the AKP’s predecessor entity, the Islamic Welfare Party, came to power in Ankara and Istanbul, where Erdogan was first elected mayor back in 1994, Oktar’s group and the Islamists may have entered into secretive business dealings of some sort. Destroying Darwinism costs a lot of lira, and some have wondered if such arrangements may have been the source of some. If this were

true, the President could be embarrassed, so maybe it was best to discredit Oktar first. Oktar’s arrest could potentially be viewed as suspicious. Firstly, the pro-AKP media must have been informed about it beforehand, as they were there to film it, *a la Cliff Richard*, and the detailed press reporting of his answers in a custody suite prior to trial seems highly irregular. And, by his own





A9 TV / FACEBOOK

ABOVE: In happier days, Adnan and his 'kittens' celebrated Christmas in style on his own cable TV channel.

account, he has been framed by the Turkish State before, forced to serve time in prison and a mental institution in the 1980s by the then-secularist government for supposedly "promoting a theocratic revolution" via his bestseller *Judaism and Freemasonry*, while in 1991, following his arrest for possession of cocaine, Oktar pleaded that the sherbet in question had been planted in his library books and food by the security services. So, when Turkish TV broadcast images of dozens of pistols and rifles apparently seized from his compound together with a fleet of armoured vehicles, his acolytes might be forgiven for thinking history was repeating itself.

Despite his support for Erdogan, the AKP has been careful to keep a certain distance from Oktar, perhaps on account of his rather eccentric opinions about Islam, such as his reported view that the "bikini is an Islamic veil" and his belief that the Prophet's ban on alcohol does not apply to vodka. Oktar often justifies his actions with reference to venerable Koranic or Ottoman traditions: his white Armani suits and designer T-shirts are but an imitation of the similarly "well-dressed" King Solomon, who also liked to surround himself with "beautiful people"; the Ottoman sultans kept harems of kitten-like concubines; encouraging his followers to break contact with their relatives is in line with the Koranic view that you should place your religion above even your family. According to Adnan: "Allah is beautiful, Allah loves those who are beautiful... [The] aim of a Muslim should be to be beautiful." And, if you are beautiful as a *houri*, then why hide this beauty under the bushel of a burka? When Oktar's male lions, such as the hunky twins Onder and Ender, made appearances

on his show, The Master praised their fine bronzed physiques too. To judge by Oktar's own creamy-white dress sense, Islam is not merely a religion of peace, but of three-piece suits. The best illustration of this comical "sexed-up Disney" synthesis of beauty and Islam, as it has been called, comes in the way his kittens have posed for photos in reputedly "overtly sexual positions", often accompanied by slogans such as 'I read the Koran' – like saucy postcards from Medina-On-Sea.

However, with the AKP takeover of the nation's media following 2016's coup attempt, religious censorship has got so bad that images of cigarettes and alcohol on terrestrial TV screens are either pixelated or, weirdly, replaced with images of flowers. Oktar is on record as saying his group "provide a balance between the modern secular and traditional orthodox [Islamic] segments of [Turkish] society, bridging the gap between the two", but the AKP would prefer to appeal to the votes of only one of those constituencies. Until recently Oktar could get away with it, as 'The Mahdi' (as some of his wilder followers allegedly consider him to be) is substantially a web-based broadcaster, an area not previously subject to full legal control. As such, the government saying 'Look, here is a dangerous individual, peddling obscenity, perverting Islam and accumulating weapons; how can we allow such heretics access to the minds of our youth via the Internet?' might be an excellent opportunity for them to crack down on online channels of all kinds – particularly those critical of Erdogan. Demonisation of satellite and web-TV has already begun, with it being alleged by pro-AKP figures that biscuit commercials and the theme-

song of the Netflix show *Casa de Papel* really functioned as subliminal trigger-agents for football riots and "an economic coup d'état, political assassinations, a wave of terror attacks, or a new treacherous scheme containing them all" to be unleashed upon Turkey by the square-eyed.

Earlier in 2018, the head of Turkey's Religious Affairs Department opined that Mr Oktar "has most likely lost his mental balance", while the Turkish version of OFCOM gave a ruling that his shows "violated gender equality and women's rights". Nonetheless, it looked as if he was already being set up for a fall, and the litany of charges laid against him and 234 of his followers after the arrest mean their collective criminal record may one day prove to be longer than the entire fossil record – but will this too prove to have been faked by Her Satanic Majesty, just like Piltdown Man? According to reports, courts have now ordered that "the property of all the suspects be seized and that government trustees be appointed to companies, foundations and associations linked to them", another blow for Turkish media plurality, while an article was slipped into an otherwise innocuous-sounding 'Law to Change Some Laws and Decrees', giving watchdogs new powers to fine and block websites and online streaming channels simply by citing nebulous "grounds of national security or ethics". Plus, webcasters now have to apply for a licence; surely no opposition supporters will get one? As more and more sceptical Turks head online for their news, seeking escape from insane government propaganda about biscuits, this would be an excellent way to choke off the final available source of dissent. Whether or not Adnan Oktar is innocent or guilty, is he being sacrificed as a scapegoat for Erdogan's Orwellian attempts to make the web "more safe and free"?

Oktar denies all charges and currently awaits trial. Expect him to find himself being beheaded in the Tower of London by the BBC's Professor Brian Cox at our monkey-loving monarch's express command any day soon.

SOURCES: Times, 22 July 2018; www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-44792102; www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2008/dec/22/atlas-creationism-adnan-oktar-harun-yahya; <http://balkanist.net/the-islamic-sex-cult-supporting-turkeys-prime-minister/>; <https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/2131/sex-flies-and-videotape-the-secret-lives-of-harun-yahya>; www.nytimes.com/2018/03/04/world/europe/turkey-erdogan-internet-law-restrictions.html; www.economist.com/europe/2018/05/24/turkeys-government-takes-new-powers-to-censor-the-internet; www.hurriyetdailynews.com/search/adnan%20oktar

Accordingly, he chose not to attend school but instead to waste his childhood throwing nuts at monkeys in the zoo, thereby accounting for the creation of his entire loony idea. As an aside, another textbook asserts that a second key Jewish scientist, Albert Einstein, was “filthy and slovenly”, and pointlessly spent much of his time eating soap – the very same substance which gassed Jews would soon be turned into by the Nazis, the text charmingly adds. Erdogan has seen to it that Turkey’s schools now give much less coverage to Ataturk, and much more time to Islam and various allied beliefs, such as that women should be naturally submissive to men at all times. Criticism of such moves has been brusquely dismissed by government officials, however. “Allah says it, not me. Should I correct Him, or what?” asked Alpaslan Durmus, chair of the Turkish Board of Education.⁴

JEWS FROM NOWHERE

Impressively for numbskulled mutant perv-monkeys, Jews have also somehow managed to gain control over the global economy, which is the *only* reason that Turkey’s economy is now in Weimar Republic-style freefall, with the Turkish lira losing 40 per cent of its value against the US dollar between February and August 2018 alone. This has nothing to do with a corrupt and artificially stimulated construction boom, facilitated by overly-easy State credit, now beginning to overheat and crash. Instead, says Erdogan, a dark “interest-rate lobby” has conspired against him, trying to shift him from his opinion that high interest rates are “the mother and father of all evil” in Turkey because they cause hyperinflation, when in fact the opposite

is true. But never mind, because, while the interest rate lobby and Donald Trump, who had recently imposed an “economic war” of financial sanctions upon him, “have the dollar... we have our Allah”. You can’t spend Allah in the shops, though, and when Erdogan appointed his son-in-law as joint head of the Treasury and Finance Ministry and declared his intention to assume full control of monetary policy from qualified central bankers because he had had enough of experts, the lira bombed even further. Proved wrong, he allowed the bankers to have their way and raise interest rates again to stem the lira’s decline. This worked, at least temporarily, but Erdogan couldn’t admit it and went on blaming agents of *Ust Akil*. Unlike the Master-Mind, the President must have a poor memory, as one of the main reasons the AKP won power for the first time back in 2001 was as the result of a financial crisis which necessitated a rescue package from the surely Jewish bankers of the IMF, thereby discrediting the previous regime. But why would Zionists engineer a path to power for raging Islamists? The Wandering Jew, being immortal, was

perhaps playing some inscrutable long-game here.⁵

Erdogan has spoken out against anti-Semitism in the past, though never his own. Yet, sometimes the mask slips. Back in 1974, he wrote, directed and starred in a play called *Mason-Communist-Jew*, which involved a Machiavellian Jewish agitator causing trouble in a Turkish factory; then, in 2015, he accused the *New York Times* of being represented by “Jewish capital”, and in 2013 he won second place in a prestigious international ‘Anti-Semite of the Year’ awards – only Iran’s perennial high-achiever Ayatollah ‘Burn Israel’ Khamenei beat him to the podium. He also once called a critical citizen the “spawn of Israel”. In November 2018, Erdogan went one further and seemingly implied that *Ust Akil* was actually “the famous Hungarian Jew” George Soros, the billionaire US-based investment banker and refugee from Nazism who has used his Open Society Foundation to fund \$32bn-worth of liberal causes around the world, from the admirable to the occasionally naïve. Whatever you think of his ideas, he means well. In Erdogan’s view, though, Soros was “a man who assigns people to divide nations and shatter them”, just as conspirators had done to Turkey, post-Sèvres. Five days later, the Turkish branch of Soros’s foundation felt it had no choice but to close its doors.⁶

MINECRAFTINESS

Do any voters actually believe this rubbish? Yes, as it often proves highly convenient. Consider the actions of Eyup Aksu, the possibly Yorkshire-born President of the Istanbul Taxi Drivers’ Association, who in 2018 stood outside a courtroom during a case brought by his members to ban their new Uber competitors and announced that “the thieving Jewish lobby serves taxi piracy in Turkey”, ruining traditional cabbies’ incomes with their obscure Kabbalistic electronic wizardry. The HQ of these Hebrew Uber-menschen, of course, was suspiciously based in America, a land owned lock, stock-market and barrel by Shylock. As such, Istanbul’s taxi-drivers had felt perfectly justified in going all Travis Bickle, beating up and shooting at Uber-driving agents of *Ust Akil* to preserve their traditional way of life. According to a startlingly frank report by an Agent of Queen Elizabeth in the *Sunday Times*, however, the real reason people were deserting the union’s *Crazy Taxi* members was because many “reek of sweat and garlic”, jump red lights, con their passengers with excessive fares, play games on their phones while speeding at 90mph, and try to sell customers items of explicit home-made ‘erotica’ starring themselves in the central roles.

But according to another analysis, old-style smelly yellow-cab drivers *have* to fleece their fares because “municipal taxi-licenses in Istanbul can cost more than £300,000



LEFT: Istanbul’s Sultan of Bling, Adnan Oktar, who until recently ran a sucessful media empire featuring his unique brand of Islamic creationism and scantily clad girls. He was arrested in July 2018 (see pp48-49).

and are tightly controlled by a cabal of owners", thus making them stupidly expensive to run. Sounds like a Jewish-capitalist plot to enslave them all to me.⁷

You can't blame drivers for trying these tactics on, though, as Erdogan has provided a handy prior model. In 2014, a disaster in a Turkish mine claimed 301 lives. Erdogan's early response was to say that such deaths "are in the nature of the business", which stoked street protests. When one of his advisors, Yusuf Yerkel, was caught on camera kicking a prone protestor being held down by policemen, as reported in "the parallel media which are in love with Jews", and Erdogan himself was then alleged to have punched a man who confronted him about it in a supermarket, press retribution became necessary. So, the AKP-friendly *Yeni Akit* led with the scoop that "all info" on the disaster "leads us to Israel", because the son-in-law of the mine's owner was apparently now Jewish. Admittedly, he had a rather Muslim-sounding name, but only because he had cunningly changed it to avoid detection – just like Charles Darwin! This conveniently ignores the fact that the mine was actually owned by an AKP-aligned company which had previously helped the Party deliver bags of free coal to voters prior to elections – a typical AKP inversion of reality.⁸

SEVRES THE BASTARD RIGHT

The best way for Islamists to fight back against the international Jewish taxi-lobby would naturally be to restore the International Caliphate which was the old Ottoman Empire by squeezing nearby lands within the confines of a Turkey sandwich once again. By 2023, the 100th birthday of the Turkish Republic, Erdogan wants this Caliphate 2.0 to be a major global power again. Therefore, Sultan Erdogan has instructed his Grand Viziers to fund Islamist mega-mosques abroad, build infrastructure for former Ottoman possessions in the Balkans, restore their ancient colonial era monuments, and so entrap them within Chinese-style 'debt colonisation'. In Bosnia and Kosovo, Turkey's State Development Agency, TIKA, plays a role analogous to that of Soros's Foundation, except aiming to create a Closed Society, not an Open one. A majority of Kosovo's banks are now Turkish, allowing financial pressure to be placed on schools to alter their curriculum to paint the Ottomans as liberators.

In his dealings with the EU, it was reported that the would-be Sultan had allegedly demanded billions or he would flood the continent with Muslim refugees. In Germany, where 3.5 million Turks already live, a smartphone app has been released for easy denunciation of 'traitors' to Erdogan's spies. Plus, he has urged the



LEFT: Author Ergun Poyraz, who has argued in his books that Erdogan is actually a "crypto-Jew" pretending to be an Islamist so he can destroy Turkey from the inside on behalf of Israel.

NOTES

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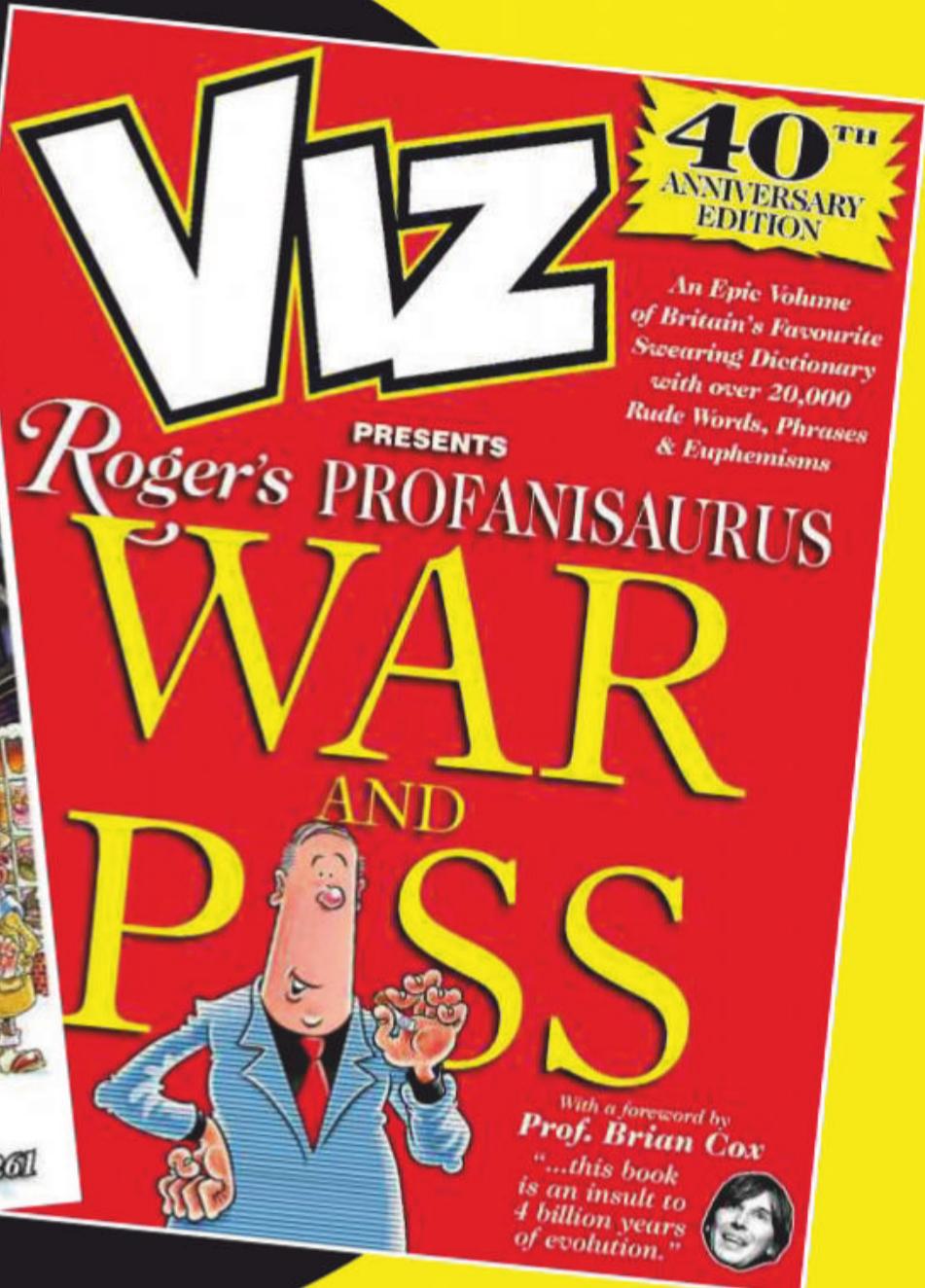
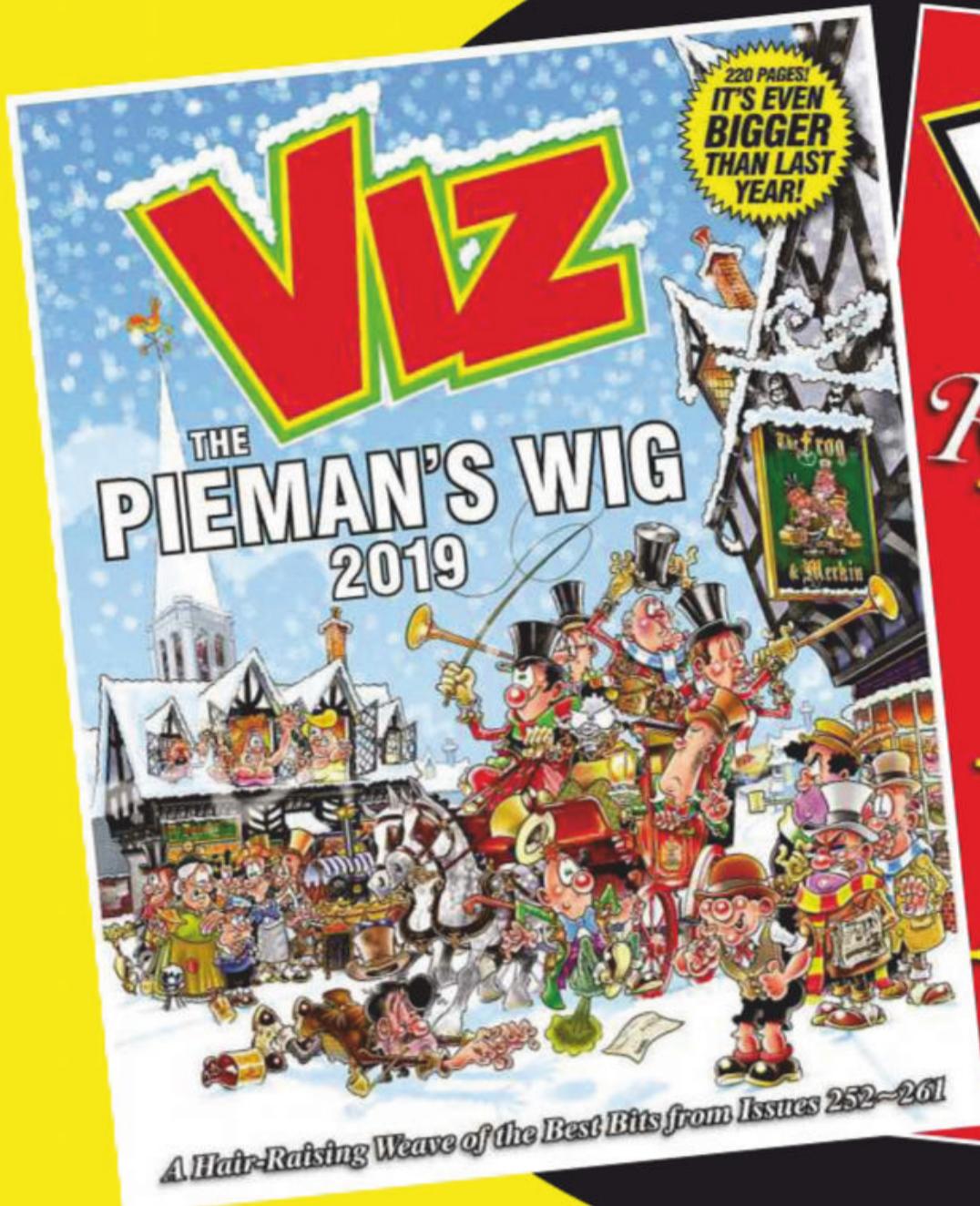
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Strange gifts of the Spirit

TED HARRISON asks what the Archbishop of Canterbury speaking in tongues means for the Church of England.

The Archbishop of Canterbury described in a recent radio interview how he starts each day speaking in tongues; evidence, if evidence were needed, that an activity that was once viewed, even in church circles, as bizarre and exotic has become mainstream. It is a major change in religious practice that has happened over just two generations. The Kent parish church, where I once sang Cranmer's Evensong in the choir, now runs a 'School of The Spirit' to enable churchgoers to find out how to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues or glossolalia (see FT310:44-49).

The popular Alpha Course, which has introduced thousands of participants to the basics of Christianity, has a strong charismatic bias and culminates in participants being enabled and encouraged to speak in tongues.

The Anglican family worldwide has been caught up in an international movement that began in the 19th century on the edges of Christendom and is now a dominant force within Protestantism and a growing movement within Catholicism. The spread of the current charismatic movement, says Church historian Prof Diarmaid MacCulloch, has been one of the great surprises of 20th century Christianity. The word 'charisma', in its religious meaning, refers to the supernatural gifts given out by the Holy Spirit, which include prophecy, visions, and speaking in tongues.

There have been independent Pentecostal churches in Britain



ABOVE: Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, enjoys a quiet moment.

for over a century, and having congregations speaking in tongues was what defined them and set them apart. They were clearly different and widely viewed as a bit odd. Many independent black churches, too, have a strong charismatic element. Revivalist preachers of the 19th and early 20th century preached that the gifts of the spirit identified by St Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 were available to the Church today and that these gifts relate to a greater personal experience of the Holy Spirit. They talked of believers receiving a 'second blessing', being 'filled with the Spirit' or being 'baptised with the Spirit'. However, in the 1960s the charismatic movement arrived in the Church of England, influencing, initially, its evangelical wing. A generation of young churchmen was in the vanguard. Many were from public schools with a background in university-based, muscular Christianity. They began speaking in tongues, firstly in private and then more boldly during public worship. Old Etonian Archbishop Welby is from this mould and was much influenced by Nicky Gumbel, the Old Etonian vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton, the pioneers of the Alpha Course.

Speaking in tongues is mentioned in the Bible. The first disciples found that after they had received the Holy Spirit on the first Whitsun, they

could address crowds in a whole range of languages. Today, while Christians claim that to speak in tongues, a believer has to be filled with The Holy Spirit, few claim that the 'tongues' they speak in are a coherent language. It takes someone else who has received other gifts of the spirit to interpret. Most speaking in tongues is used as a form of prayer during which, instead of formulating sentences, the worshipper lets forth what sounds like a stream of gibberish.

In a concluding Alpha Course video, Nicky Gumbel described receiving the Holy Spirit as being "like being a boiler with the pilot light burning – but to be filled with the spirit is when the boiler goes 'whoosh!'".

When over 1,000 clergy-in-training were questioned by Dr Andrew Village of Warwick University between 2004 and 2007, he found 42 per cent had spoken in tongues, 39 per cent gave words of prophecy and 71 per cent believed they had been directed by God through visions or dreams. Since then the figures have almost undoubtedly grown.

Some Anglican churches regularly hold services that include not just speaking in tongues, but in which members of the congregation are also 'slain in the spirit'. They go into ecstatic trances, keel over and writhe on the floor, sometimes laughing uncontrollably. These phenomena

spread rapidly around the country at the time of the Toronto Blessing in the mid-1990s. This revival movement, focusing on these supposed spiritual gifts, started at a church in Toronto and spread across the Atlantic (see FT77:24-28).

At the core of Christian teaching are stories of the supernatural – such as miraculous healings and the raising of the dead – but until recently few mainstream Anglicans expected to witness anything supernatural in their own day and age. Speaking in tongues has been described as a form of mysticism. It is a style of religious practice that involves more than simply assenting to creeds and going to Church: it is an all-embracing emotional experience. As such, it has also been described as an antidote to the modern age and has proved popular with a class of people in highly responsible jobs who have to remain logical and focused in the workplace. Charismatic worship enables them to shed inhibitions. I once saw a group of off-duty police officers – who during the week were armed and responsible for protecting a major airport – being slain in the spirit.

Despite the Archbishop's daily glossolalia, it is still the case that the wider population does not perceive the national Church as a charismatic movement. The public image of the Church, it could be argued, is at least 30 years out of date. The charismatic wing of the Church of England is growing and in the ascendency, and charismatic worship is seen as the way to revive a dying institution. More traditional Anglicans are cautious, however, and fear charismatic excess could turn the historic national Church into little more than a happy-clappy sect from which a majority of the population feel excluded.

► **TED HARRISON** MAY is a writer, artist, and former BBC religious affairs correspondent.

Parapsychology – in from the cold?

ALAN MURDIE asks if 2018 could prove to have been the year when parapsychology gained mainstream acceptance.

The signs at least of a certain thawing in attitudes and an overdue rapprochement between psychical research and psychology have been recognised in the decision by the American Psychological Society to publish an article, *The Experimental Evidence for parapsychological phenomena: A review* by Etzel Cardeña.¹

Although not approving the existence of psi phenomena, the American Psychological Association has quietly endorsed the validity of the work in the field, if not its conclusions. Cardeña's article concludes: "The evidence for Psi is comparable to that for established phenomena in psychology and other disciplines". It is difficult to argue otherwise. In short, parapsychologists have played by the rules and obtained significant results. Indeed, in terms of self-criticism, knowing that they will be scrutinised and critiqued, they have been prepared to tighten controls and protocols.

Cardeña provides a polished review of contemporary experimental evidence concerning parapsychological phenomena. Reports have appeared throughout history of events seemingly violating ordinary experience of space, time and causality. When tested in the laboratory, over the years some test participants achieve patterns of results far beyond levels expected through chance or on a 'null hypothesis' (i.e. what would be expected if effects did not exist). Independent empirical studies,

widely separated, provide a cumulative case for phenomena variously labelled as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition or 'extra-sensory perception' (ESP) now collectively termed 'psi'. In presenting his case, Cardeña condenses a number of arguments made repeatedly in support of psi since the 1970s, and some for much longer. It is a complex area because psi effects manifest in some studies but not others. Parapsychologists have recognised strange declines in positive scores, and in others test subjects scoring well below chance ('psi-missing'). Statistically significant effects are not repeatable with every study but meta-analysis – where the results of multiple studies are combined and analysed – reveals significant traces supporting the idea of an overall psi effect.

Such a collection of findings cannot be readily explained away by the quality of the studies, selective reporting, experimental or analytical incompetence, fraud or other frequently advanced criticism. The evidence for psi effects is comparable to that for established phenomena in psychology and other disciplines, although there is no consensual understanding concerning them.

Similar conclusions were published 15 years ago in a paper, 'A Compendium of the Evidence for Psi', by Profs. Adrian Parker and Göran Brusewitz at Göteborg University, Sweden, declaring: "The psi-effect is replicable to the extent that it permits meaningful and productive research," and concluding psi research is "no more difficult than many other difficult but important fields of human research such as hypnosis, creativity, sexual behaviour, and psychotherapy." However, whereas this appeared in the now-defunct *European Journal*



LEFT: Etzel Cardeña.

covered this publication, with staff writer Alex Fradera in the *BPS Research Digest* also noting it as significant.⁴

The argument is long-standing, beginning with psychical research before the arrival of lab-based parapsychology. Although psychology and psychical research historically emerged together after World War I, they divided upon the acceptability of psi phenomena. Following a symposium in November 1926 at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, 'The Case For and Against Psychical Belief', Walter Prince sought to present the case for psychical research to the wider scientific and scholarly audience, supplying hundreds of leading figures, with details of case collection studies, abnormal psychology, hypnosis and mediumship from the previous 50 years. He issued a questionnaire survey to a collection of contemporaries, particularly those who were adversaries of psychical research, with an invitation to engage. But it became apparent that hostility was deeply entrenched, with many sceptics labouring under illusions or committing elementary blunders in understanding, which Prince exposed in a book *The Enchanted Boundary* (1930).⁵ The failure of this case accumulation approach to make progress was a factor, along with frustration at sitting in spiritualist circles leading Dr Joseph Banks Rhine (1895-1980), "the father of parapsychology", to embark upon laboratory-based statistical testing.⁶

Hitherto, it has been a common view that many scientific journals exhibit a prejudice against publishing positive reports from parapsychology. However, this is harder to sustain since Daryl Bem published work on pre-sentience in the *Journal of*



Personality and Social Psychology (considered the world's leading journal in psychology with stringent criteria for acceptance) in 2011 (see FT270:04, 274:56).⁷

In the UK, interaction between psychologists and parapsychologists seems generally cordial in academic circles. Furthermore, impressions of scientific hostility have often been derived from broad-brush condemnations issuing from a loud minority of vocal critics in other fields (some since deceased) receiving disproportionate repetition in popular articles. Today, fewer psychologists exhibit outright negativity, many having no strong feelings either way or merely having no interest, being otherwise busy in keeping up with developments in their own specialities. Concerning difficulties in publishing results, parapsychologists are not alone, with the process of selection in academic and scientific journals being a multi-determined matter where many factors affect acceptance.⁸

Potentially of greater concern are 'skeptical' suggestions that there is a data crisis in psychology itself as a result of parapsychological experiments. When the presentence studies by Bem were published, an editorial in *New Scientist* commented: "The affair may bolster the argument that there is a flaw in the way most researchers test their hypothesis",⁹ a backhanded recognition that parapsychologists had played by the rules and still achieved positive results. This is just not acceptable to some opponents, triggering suggestions the rules themselves may now have to change (a danger originally recognised by the maxim of St Paul - 'Live by the spirit of the law, not by the letter, for the letter killeth').¹⁰ However, demanding that the rules should now be changed spells wider epistemological trouble for many other published findings in psychology unrelated to psi, which proceeded on the same principles and methodologies.

Underpinning on-going opposition is the view psi phenomena fundamentally contradict scientific models outside psychology. Cardeña only touches on this in outline, rejecting claims that psi violates 'the laws of physics'. Here it might be better to talk about models rather than laws, and he draws attention to how concepts of non-locality and retro-causal affects (i.e. those seemingly going back in time) are acknowledged in quantum physics. This is not an original point, but subject to much misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Some researchers are certainly considering if quantum physics might shed light on the mechanisms of psi, but that is not the same as declaring psi effects are examples of quantum events.

Postulated links with quantum physics might ultimately turn out to be a dead end, along with beliefs, popular from the mid-19th century and surviving into the 1970s, that telepathy and clairvoyance were electrical or electromagnetic in nature.¹¹ Cardeña's comparisons only remove philosophical objections to ideas concerning the possibility of psi *per se*. The gulf remaining to be crossed is with connecting the apparent reality of psi effects to such existing scientific models as we have, so as to be capable of making predictions and setting up experiments.

This is part of a much wider and fascinating philosophical argument on the ultimate nature of reality, aired more than half a century ago by Arthur Koestler and set down in his *The Roots of Coincidence* (1972).¹² Koestler argued that many ideas in modern physics, from the subatomic to the cosmological level, were as extraordinary as ideas of ESP and claims from occult literature. As a former Marxist and materialist who renounced communism and authored the anti-Communist classic *Darkness at Noon* (1941), Koestler appreciated Cold War metaphors concerning the ideologically driven suppression

of dissenting opinions by orthodoxy. Increasingly fascinated by parapsychology from the early 1950s, he and his wife eventually bequeathed their estates to fund university research (see FT201:32-39, 224:58-59).

Increased institutional strength and the growth of technology also favour parapsychology today. In 1985, of 30 possible applicants for the Koestler bequest, only four universities showed interest and ultimately only two applications were completed from Edinburgh and Cardiff, with Edinburgh University eventually being endowed. (With the current funding crisis in higher education it is harder to imagine such indifference today).¹³ In subsequent decades, parapsychology departments have sprung up in other universities, whilst others politely veil interest with a focus on anomalistic psychology or "exceptional human experience".

Increased use of automated technology makes the running of multiple trials far simpler, reducing the scope for human error and information leakage and rebutting assertions that poor experimental designs are responsible for artefacts. Results can be disseminated immediately by electronic and social media, whilst laptops can be utilised for research outside the laboratory. A number of such innovative experimental designs were showcased at the Newcastle conference of the Society for Psychical Research in September 2018. Ironically, demonstrating the most elusive of effects concerning the human mind is now being enhanced by the rise of machines.

NOTES

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9 Editorial *New Scientist*, 20 Nov 2010.

10 1 Corinthians 11:25.

11 Traceable, with varying degrees of support from mesmerism for over a 150 years see Brian Inglis, *Natural and Supernatural* (1977) d.g.; Edward Moor (1841), *Bealings Bells*; Catherine Crowe (1848), *The Night Side of Nature* through to John Taylor, (1975) *Superminds* (1975), where the author considered electromagnetism could be the only explanation, subsequently recanting in *Science and the Supernatural* (1980).

12 Arthur Koestler (1972): *The Roots of Coincidence* (Hutchinson, London).

13 *Sunday Express Magazine*, 24 Mar 1985.

 **ALAN MURDIE** is a lawyer and writer with a longstanding interest in fortean phenomena. A former president of the Ghost Club, he compiles FT's monthly *Ghostwatch* column.

THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

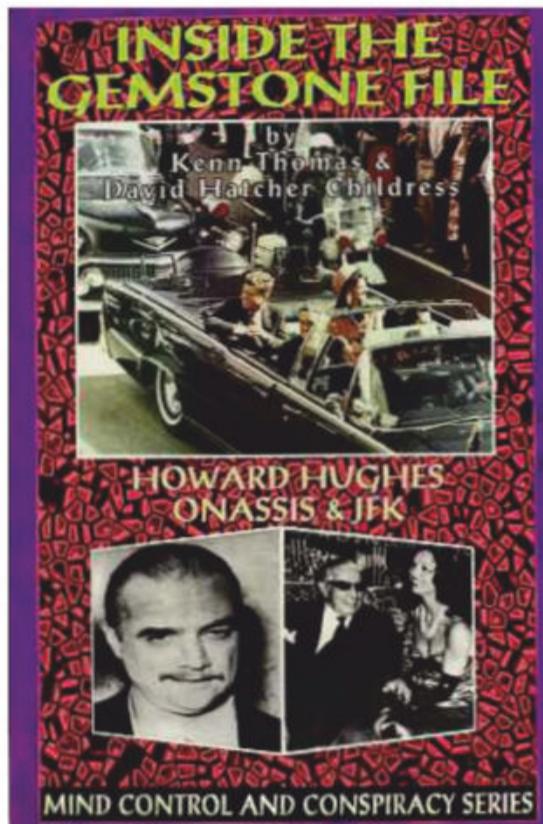
BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

43. OH RUBY - FOR GOD'S SAKE TURN AROUND

Welcome to the *Gemstone Files*. The plural is not accidental. There are actually two Gemstone files. The first, widely circulated in photocopies in sundry editions from about 1975, was *The Skeleton Key to the Gemstone Files*, compiled by journalist Stephanie Caruana. This was a summary of some 350 pages, out of an alleged total of over 1,000, of letters written by the semi-mysterious Bruce Porter Roberts to all and sundry, between 1969 and his death in 1976. These original letters – the second, or rather first, Gemstone File – remained elusive until about the turn of the century, when Martin Cannon managed to clap eyes on that basic 350 of them, and in 2001 published “Exposed at Last: The Real Gemstone File”. You can read *The Skeleton Key* in either of the books discussed here; Cannon’s essay is online, as is the whole slew of Roberts’s 350 letters on which the tale rests, viewable from www.think-aboutit.com/category/other-bs-2/new-world-order-2/the-gemstone-files/. No one seems to know where the missing 650-odd pages are. And from here, the plot thickens. Bisto, arrowroot and cornflour have nothing on this lot for thickening things.

Here’s an outline of Bruce Porter Roberts’s conclusions as to what’s really going on – or was going on, before his time of dying in 1976. A severely condensed and lightly edited version of Martin Cannon’s excellent summary of the *Skeleton Key*:

“A covert cabal, which Bruce Roberts usually calls ‘The Mafia’, runs the entire world, controlling the American defense department, the intelligence agencies, and the Vatican. Greek shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis ran the Mafia. The Kennedy family had joined this evil consortium. But aviator/industrialist Howard Hughes, having paid off Vice President Nixon in the 1950s, had carved out a rival empire. Onassis kidnapped Hughes in 1957, with the help of Hughes’s own aides; the scuffle left Hughes ‘battered and brain-damaged.’ He spent the rest of his days on Skorpios, Onassis’s private island, deliberately addicted to heroin by his captors. A double assumed the place of ‘Hughes’. By 1960, Onassis controlled both the Republican and Democratic candidates for president. Following the death of his father, John F Kennedy began to act contrary to ‘Mafia’ instructions. His administration sanctioned a raid on an anti-Castro hit team in Louisiana – a team owing ultimate allegiance to Onassis. Infuriated, Onassis targeted the very president he had placed in office, and had JFK killed. When Robert Kennedy ran for president in 1968, Onassis used a hypno-programmed assassin to silence yet another wayward underling. Teddy Kennedy, having learned his lesson, swore eternal obedience to the tycoon,



and murdered Mary Jo Kopechne on Chappaquiddick Island to prevent her from revealing what she had uncovered about the family’s Mafia ties. Onassis covered up the homicide. Onassis engineered the Vietnam war to secure his oil and heroin interests, then released the fraudulent *Pentagon Papers* to divert attention from the assassination conspiracies. J Edgar Hoover threatened to expose the JFK and Hughes scandals, having learned the truth from Roberts’s papers; the FBI boss soon fell to sodium morphate, and most of his files were burned. Nearing re-election,

President Nixon hired a band of Mafia/CIA operatives and formed the ‘Plumbers’ to plug information leaks, conduct break-ins, and covertly attack opponents. In February, 1972, the Plumbers spied on Roberts in a San Francisco bar, where he spoke at length about the things he knew – including his knowledge of synthetic gemstones. The Plumbers then famously broke into Democratic headquarters at the Watergate hotel, not knowing that San Francisco private detective Hal Lipset, in disguise, provided the ‘second piece of tape’ which resulted in the capture of the Watergate burglars. Video cameras captured the entire event. When the scandal broke, Nixon voiced his displeasure with ‘asshole Roberts’. His comments were excised from the White House tapes – thus explaining the famous 18.5-minute gap therein. Detective Lipset also overheard Roberts pass information to the Russian consulate in San Francisco. This information led directly to Nixon’s resignation; had he not stepped down, the impeachment trial would have uncovered the truth about ‘Hughes’ and Onassis. In March 1975, Aristotle Onassis died. Killings continued as various factions of the Mafia jockeyed for power.”

Onassis’s favoured method of disposing of those in his way, says Roberts, was apple pie laced with sodium morphate. According to Roberts, this is a common ingredient in commercial rat poison, tastes conveniently of apples, and the Mafia have used it for centuries to induce fake cardiac arrests. So why go to all the palaver Roberts claims (against all best evidence) was involved in shooting JFK, when an all-American slice would have been so much simpler to serve up? Answer: in the real world, sodium morphate would seem not to exist. Ah.

And, you may be innocently enquiring as your mind twirls, what does all this have to do with gemstones? Roberts purportedly invented a method of making synthetic rubies. This he attempted to sell to the Hughes Aircraft Company, which in 1960 devised the first laser. Hughes Aircraft, he claimed, stole his ideas. Given that by the 1920s, some four fully effective means of synthesising rubies had been devised and were up and running – and most are now produced using a technique invented in

1903 – one wonders why Hughes would bother. Roberts somewhat grandiosely expanded on his experiments. Caruana writes that they seem “to have led to the theoretical and practical development of a weapon far more powerful than the ‘conventional’ nuclear bomb. Roberts has described it as ‘ass-hole-to-bellybutton fusion, taking 22 hours’; as ‘anti-matter’; and like the death of a dwarf star, which flares up for 11 hours, then becomes a black hole in space.” Pretty good for a man whose lab was his garage, in which an explosion once burned away his eyebrows. If Hughes did steal anything from him, perhaps it’s just as well. By some leap of logic Roberts then became an investigator of conspiracies, gathering information, says Caruana, thus: “‘Gemstones’ – synthetic rubies and sapphires, with accompanying ‘histories’ – gemstone papers – were sold or given away to foreign consular officials – in return for information. A worldwide information network was gradually developed – a trade of the intelligence activities of many countries.” If that sounds less than likely to you, join the club. There’s little doubt that Roberts wrote his letters; but less certainty that he ever sent them – or any gemstones – to anyone, or had an answer if he did.

A couple more of Roberts’s myriad obsessions bear mention. One is his intermittent exhibition of antisemitism. He maintained that Giovanni Montini (Pope Paul VI) had a Jewish mother, which in Judaism makes him fully Jewish, which in turn made him yet more evil, venal and wicked to Roberts than Roberts already thought he was. Roberts also re-wrote biblical history with an odd slant: “Jesus Christ was an Arab, born April 16, 6 BC.... Arab (Persian) astronomers (the Magi) came to Bethlehem to look for their king... and found him in a stable, because the Jews wouldn’t let Arabs Mary and Joseph into their nice clean inns, even then. When Jesus overturned the tables of the moneylenders at the Temple, the Jews had the Romans nail him to a cross. He died on the cross when the Roman soldiers stuck a spear in his side, pulled out his liver, and ate it. Tacitus, the Roman historian, described it all – in a chunk of history deleted by the Church.” *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* has nothing on this. These little-known, er, facts Roberts supposedly acquired from Cardinal Eugène Tisserant’s secret diary. How he managed to eyeball that remains strangely unexplained.

Roberts was much possessed by this image of naughty people gnawing on livers: consider this, from the original Gemstone letters: “Onassis tells me I can eat Hearst’s liver when all this blows over – and my psychiatrist’s... Onassis says my college roommate, Joan Tunney, gets out of her English nut house soon and that she enjoyed eating her husband’s liver after she chopped his head off. Onassis says she gets to eat the livers of everybody at the nut house... During his Mafia trial, Alioto



LEFT: Aristotle and Jackie Onassis in 1968.

dodgy dealings down under. And very boring it is too. If Kiwis find this interesting, the sheep have no call to be nervous. Both have contributions by Mae Brussell, sometime keeper of the whole Roberts *oeuvre*. That in Keith’s book is a relatively sober assessment of the material, though one has to bear in mind that Brussell (who died in 1988) was a manically obsessive conspiracist, and somewhat challenged in the logic department. If you doubt this, read the first part of her contribution to the Thomas–Childress volume. This is a transcription of a 1978 radio broadcast, and actually has

little bearing on Gemstone. From a fairly coherent start it soon descends into a classic 120°-proof rant, names and accusations of nefariousness tumbling out like flying ants on Fornication Day, all joined by the slenderest of gossamer threads. It seems to be a habit of conspiracists to blind readers not with science but so many names, dates and factoids that the brain gets indigestion. This is a masterpiece of that incoherent genre. Back at the Keith volume: Keith himself has a fair assessment of the story (and of Roberts); Robert Anton Wilson has a discursive piece that reads like an introduction to the book that somehow didn’t make it to the front; others deconstruct Roberts’s ramblings about the Catholic church and the (non-) existence of sodium morphate – brush up your chemistry for that – while others ponder whether Gemstone is a hoax (verdict: possibly, but it’s still all bullshit) and the corruption deriving from the Mafia.

The Thomas–Childress book is by far the nuttier of the two. Childress, need we say, buys the whole thing, and wanders into using a James Bond movie as ‘proof’ that Onassis abducted Howard Hughes in 1957. There are digressions into a whole other conspiracy legend, ‘COM-12’, and how many conspiracy researchers have ‘mysteriously’ died; and lots of newspaper clippings and photographs. If not overly informative about Gemstone as such, it does stand as a fine example of the conspiratorial cast of mind and where it can lead.

Our own conclusion: how could a Greek, no matter how rich, manage to grab command of the (Sicilian) Mafia? No one seems to have asked this rather basic question. So, we incline toward Martin Cannon’s harsh conclusion: Roberts “was not merely neurotic, foolish, wrong-headed, eccentric, fanatical, odd, single-minded, silly, mistaken, paranoid or any of the other adjectives commonly used to describe conspiracy buffs. He was insane.” We’d be a mite kinder, and say “unhinged”.

Jim Keith (ed), *The Gemstone File*, IllumiNet Press, 1992; Kenn Thomas & David Hatcher Childress (eds), *Inside the Gemstone File*, Arcturus Press 1999.

“FROM THE
MOMENT I PICKED
UP YOUR BOOK
UNTIL I PUT IT
DOWN, I WAS
CONVULSED
WITH LAUGHTER.
SOME DAY I
INTEND
READING IT.”

Groucho Marx

shocked the jury by eating barbecued girl liver – Newsom’s nieces, Pelosi’s daughters – plus a roasted older Japanese liver, the nurse... I imagine the six-year-old girl’s liver was the tenderest.” And cop this if you can: “Onassis was gonna give some of JFK’s liver to his Turk blackmail friend, Mustapha, when he walked down the gangplanks in Turkey with JFK’s wife, Jackie... [but] Onassis didn’t get JFK’s liver until three weeks later at Dallas... and he was so hungry he ate the whole thing.” There is more of this gastronomic tendency in the File. It does not appear to be metaphorical in intent, even less ironic. But who knew, eh? Just be careful what you order next time you nip into the Greasy Spoon.

The two books on offer here, *The Gemstone File* edited by Jim Keith, and *Inside the Gemstone File* edited by Kenn Thomas and David Hatcher Childress, were both assembled before the letters on which the *Skeleton Key* was based became generally available. It’s moot as to whether sight of them would have greatly altered anything in these essays. Both contain some basic ‘hard’ data – the *Skeleton Key*, and its expansion by an anonymous New Zealander, *The Kiwi Gemstone*, which is an immense post-Roberts history of allegedly

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War and the weird re-examined

An academic folklorist and the editor of the SPR journal examine the supernatural – ghosts and angels, magic and witchcraft – during the Great War in complementary and recommended studies

A Supernatural War

Magic, Divination and Faith During the First World War

Owen Davies

Oxford University Press 2018

Hb, 284pp, illus, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9780198794554

Angels in the Trenches

Spiritualism, Superstition and the Supernatural During the First World War

Leo Ruickbe

Robinson 2018

Pb, 418pp, ind, £13.99, ISBN 9781472139597

To adapt an old saying: you wait ages for the definitive book on the supernatural in the First World War and then two come along at once. *A Supernatural War* and *Angels in the Trenches* appeared in time for the centenary of the Armistice. Now the war has passed out of living memory, we rely on surviving archived accounts of those who fought and died, in the trenches and on the home front, to make sense of what happened. Despite the existence of masses of relevant material – much of it untouched – in oral histories, newspapers and private collections, historians have tended to either ignore or sideline accounts of spiritual, supernatural and fortean phenomena during the conflict. Even social historians who have dipped their toes into the history of Spiritualism and related beliefs in the UK and Europe have tended to end their coverage in 1914 as if there was some invisible dividing line between ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ that was marked by the Great War.

That omission has now been rectified by these two excellent

and meticulously researched books. The authors appear to have been unaware of each other’s writing projects but this works to the benefit of the reader who has a surfeit of riches and good scholarship to absorb. The results are similar in some respects but very different in others. The two accounts complement each other and occasionally overlap in their coverage. Davies’s adopts a thematic approach and presents his subject matter in a series of defined chapters that cover prophecies and wonders, ghosts and angels, fortune telling, lucky charms and faith in the trenches. Ruickbe opts for a more chronological account of weirdness that he breaks into sections built around the four years of war ending with an account of the White Cavalry legend of 1918 (see FT373: 50–51).

Davies is a folklorist and Professor of Social History who has published on ghost beliefs, magic and witchcraft. Ruickbe is editor of the *Paranormal Review*, the magazine of the London-based Society for Psychical Research. He is the first scholar to draw upon the SPR’s extensive archive, held at the University of Cambridge library, as a source for First World War social history. This allowed him to draw upon primary sources to produce an absorbing new account of the respective roles played by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the eminent physicist Sir Oliver Lodge in the resurgence of interest in Spiritualism and the paranormal during the war.

Lodge was one of the SPR’s most prominent members at the time and his deep interest in Spiritualism was magnified following the loss of his son

“The SPR did not receive a mass of first-hand accounts of supernatural experiences”

Raymond, 26, on the Western Front during 1915. Grief stricken, he and Lady Lodge turned to one of the best known mediums of the period, Gladys Osborne Leonard, who produced a series of intriguing messages allegedly from the spirit of Raymond. Lodge’s book named after his son went through at least 10 editions during the war and inspired a rash of copycat spirit memoirs.

Nevertheless, Davies’s research nips in the bud the idea that the mass loss of life in the trenches led to a popular revival of ‘superstitious’ beliefs and practices. The press certainly played a role in promoting the pronouncements of assorted astrologers and prophets and eagerly reported rumours such as the Angels of Mons. Periodically the authorities would clamp down on the activities of fortune tellers and mediums, mainly due to worries about their impact on public morale. One surprising fact is the SPR actually experienced a small overall decrease in its membership during the war. Davies and Ruickbe found the Society did not, as it had expected, receive a mass of first-hand accounts of supernatural experiences from ordinary soldiers, sailors and airmen. Indeed, SPR council minutes from 1916 lament that “one might perhaps have

expected that the war, with its large tale of casualties and with the increased emotional tension accompanying it, would have produced a number of interesting experiences,” but “on the whole, evidence of apparitions at time of death has been conspicuous by its absence.” The lack of any strong evidential testimony was, at least in the early days of the war, replaced by rumours of divine intervention on the fronts in the form of stories about interventions by spectral archers, saints and angels.

Both authors tackle the Angels of Mons phenomenon (see FT170:30–38, FT319:54–55) and adopt a sceptical view of the ‘evidence’ put forward at the time. This legend is perhaps the most familiar of the alleged supernatural occurrences during the war, at least from the British Commonwealth perspective. Davies sets the story in a European context of divine messages and appearances by the Virgin Mary and other saints that circulated widely in Catholic and Orthodox countries. Angels and saints were invoked for protection on both sides of the front alongside the popularity of a variety of amulets, some secular and others that invoked St George, Joan of Arc and other saintly and legendary heroes. For example a German postcard, used on the dust-jacket, is captioned ‘The Warrior’s Guardian Angels’ and depicts a ‘figure with angel wings looking over the shoulder of a rifleman ready to fire’. Ruickbe’s careful examination of the SPR’s records produced some intriguing new leads, but no smoking gun.



Continued on p60

Fever dreams of science

Byron and Shelley discussed science before she wrote Frankenstein, so Joel Levy's focus on the history of ideas is welcome

Frankenstein and the Birth of Science

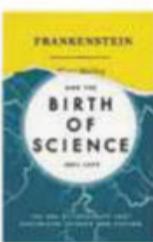
Joel Levy

André Deutsch 2018
Hb, 207pp, illus, bib, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9780233005355

For, arguably, the first SF novel, *Frankenstein* contains remarkably little science. Victor uses "instruments of life" to "infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet". Mary Shelley leaves the details of how Victor reanimates the corpse opaque. But that lack of scientific verisimilitude hasn't stopped literary detectives picking over her inspirations and antecedents. These investigations deepen our understanding of this seminal novel and, as Joel Levy exemplifies in his new book, are fascinating in their own right.

For instance, Victor's "spark of being" evokes electricity. In 1803, Giovanni Aldini, Professor of Physics at the University of Bologna, visited London and electrically stimulated the corpse of George Forster, recently executed at Newgate. The cadaver opened an eye, raised and clenched his right hand and his "legs and thighs were set in motion". Aldini boasted that he'd previously made "the hand of a headless man clutch a coin and throw it across a room". Aldini was something of a showman – early 19th century science was often closer to the theatre than the laboratory, reminiscent, perhaps, of the 'Dr Fronkenstein' scene in *Young Frankenstein*. Hundreds attended scientific lectures and demonstrations in London and other cities.

Early 19th century science wasn't a matrix of increasingly obscure specialisms: it was a central part of public



discourse, debate and entertainment – for Mary more than most. As Marilyn Butler noted in her insightful introduction to the Oxford University Press edition of the 1818 version of *Frankenstein*, Mary's father – the radical writer William Godwin – was friendly with many in the scientific avant-garde. Mary's husband, the poet Percy Shelley, was well versed in the scientific literature, and in her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, she remarks on the scientific trends that stimulated her imagination and recounted that Shelley and Bryon discussed scientific topics around the time she started writing the story.

Levy offers an excellent 'headline' overview of the scientific themes, ideas and discussions swirling around at the time and that, probably, informed and inspired, in Butler's phrase, Shelley's "impressionistic and composite group-portrait of the established science of the day". Levy brings the discussion up to date, covering 'head transplants' (or, he notes, is it really a body transplant?) and the Vacanti mouse. Studies in the 1950s and 1970s showed that head transplants were possible in dogs and monkeys. The unfortunate creatures survived for a few days. Some surgeons believe a human head transplant may be feasible. The Vacanti mouse hit the headlines in 1997 when scientists grew an ear-shaped cartilage structure on its back. Vivisection and the ethics of scientific endeavour are two of the myriad themes raised by *Frankenstein*.

Nevertheless, a full appreciation of the genesis of this remarkable book needs to consider Mary's life and inspirations beyond science, which are outside Levy's brief.

For instance, in the letters that frame the book, Robert Walton, an Arctic explorer, recounts that he rescued Victor, who was perusing his creature across "vast and irregular plains of ice, which seemed to have no end". Levy notes that "icy regions of the world held a special fascination for the Romantic imagination" and neatly summarises the scientific background to this part of the narrative.

Miranda Seymour in her landmark biography of Mary Shelley points out that she spent a large part of 1812–14 in Dundee. The sailors, Seymour comments, brought home "terrible stories of desolation, and icy mountains". She argues – and for what it's worth, I agree – that Walton is such an "intriguing figure" that he might belong to an earlier story.

In the 1831 preface Mary Shelley says that "as a child I scribbled" and wrote stories. So perhaps the story was lost during her itinerant lifestyle. Perhaps the story existed only in Mary Shelley's mind. In any case, the tale of an Arctic journey probably lay germinating in her imagination long before that famous June night in Switzerland. Levy's focus on the history of ideas makes *Frankenstein and the Birth of Science* the ideal counterpart to a more literary biography or study.

Regular *FT* readers will, I suspect, recognise many of the examples summarised in this nicely illustrated book. Nevertheless, *Frankenstein and the Birth of Science* is valuable for any Franken-fan. It's a useful overview of the febrile state of science at the time, and deepens your understanding of a book that remains essential reading 200 years after it first shocked Georgian Britain.

Mark Greener



Continued from p59

An uncatalogued box turned out to include a small trove of papers covering the period 1915–16 when the Society's research officer Helen Salter tried in vain to track the story to a first-hand source. One promising line was a FOAF story that a British General, Charles 'Bertie' Prowse, "saw a host of figures between his line and the Germans" during the retreat from Mons. But despite her efforts to contact Prowse, the trail ran cold.

As Ruickbie points out, the Angels of Mons legend retained its popularity because it was an example of "a paranormal event that could be conscripted by the Church". The séances and spirit messages promoted by Lodge and Conan Doyle were, conversely, "more than bordering on forbidden necromancy" and could not be officially promoted. Nevertheless, soldiers and ordinary folk continued to place their faith in folk magic throughout the war, whether Catholic or Protestant. Both authors devote space to stories about soldiers saved from certain death by Bibles that stopped bullets from finding their victims. Among the numerous good luck charms popular with British troops were swastikas, the ancient eastern symbol of good fortune that was later appropriated by the Nazis.

If you have time to read only one of these books, then Owen Davies will provide you with a comprehensive overview of wartime weirdness. But if you are interested in the role of the SPR during the war, Leo Ruickbie's account is equally recommended.

David Clarke

Supernatural ★★★★☆

Angels ★★★★☆

Circle of Deceit

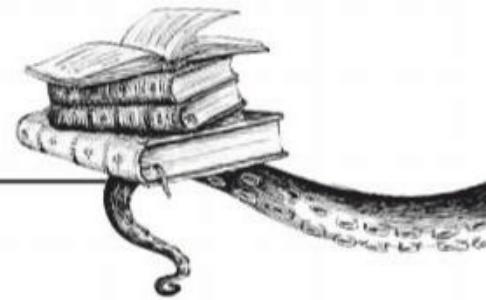
A Terrifying Alien Agenda in Ireland and Beyond

Dermot Butler & Carl Nally; foreword: David Cayton

Flying Disk Press 2018

Pb, 213pp, illus, notes, ind, £12.50, ISBN 9781980221548

Something of a fortean staple, animal mutilation has been, and no doubt will continue to be, well documented and riven with speculation. Alongside the familiar theories about alien



machinations and sinister military agencies *Circle* emphasises the emotional impact of the inexplicable and grotesque goings-on upon one family, the McLaughlins of County Derry. Citing cases from as far back as the 18th century and addressing the subject in a global context, the authors counterpoint their understanding of the McLaughlin case with reports that complement their enquiry. As curious as the Women's Land Army reports of 1949 or the existence of a Shrewsbury UFO corridor may be, the reader is never far from a rather explicit reminder that mutilation is a very real thing and the theories that colonise our understanding of it take second place to the grim despondency it so often engenders. As one would expect, there is plenty of discussion of the possibility of alien, governmental and military responsibility for such horrors, but the authors, much to their credit, favour the human story over the usual fare of conspiracy and alien contact – this is a serious piece of research and documentation.

The McLaughlin family, sheep farmers from County Derry, Northern Ireland, were witness to decades of animal mutilation and yet were treated with monumental indifference by the very agencies that purportedly existed to help them. Brought to the attention of David Cayton, director of the Animal Pathology Research Unit in 2006, the McLaughlin case embodied the concerns the unit sought to address following its creation in 2001; a forum for the sociological, scientific and legal investigation of animal mutilation cases. Drawing on Cayton's original case files, the authors review the rather complex story of the McLaughlin mutilations, which number around 500 from the 1990s to date. The case received no coverage, however, until an article appeared in the *Belfast Telegraph* in 2005 which brought to the public's attention the scale and frequency of the mutilation events at the farm. Despite Gerry McLaughlin's pursuance of the correct

veterinary protocols after each occurrence, none of the relevant authorities – the police, the Department of Agriculture and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals – staged any significant investigation. The story becomes even more Byzantine as we are told that approaches to the Chief Constable, DEFRA, the Republic of Ireland and even the police ombudsman were obfuscated; paperwork was 'disappeared', and conversations were denied. Media interest collapsed and even the Human Rights Commission got cold feet. Regardless of any putative UFO angle, what was going on?

Above and beyond the paranormal, this is a compelling account of the individual refusing to kowtow to the monolithic state whatever its agenda may be, and one's heart goes out to the indomitable spirit of the McLaughlins as they meet head-on each new bureaucratic obstacle. A must for any reader, fortean or otherwise. Well indexed and annotated and with plenty of reproductions of original paperwork – forget 'Doomwatch' and Nigel Kneale – this is the real thing!

Chris Hill

★★★★★

The Unquiet Grave

A Novel

Sharyn McCrumb

Simon and Schuster 2017

Hb, 376pp, \$26.00, ISBN 9781476772875

The Unquiet Grave is a retelling of the story of The Greenbrier Ghost, which McCrumb describes as West Virginia's best-known supernatural incident. This was the only known case in US history in which the testimony of a ghost was allowed as evidence. The concluding author's note indicates that she did her share of research. I found myself thinking I might have preferred a nonfiction telling of the story, but most readers will be perfectly happy with this novel. Fans of rural literature are always drawn to McCrumb's Appalachian settings and earthy-but-wise characters, and her books are reliable visitors to the bestseller lists.

The lead character is JP Gardner, West Virginia's first

black attorney. The story switches back and forth from 1930 to 1897. As the lawyer finds himself in an insane asylum, he tells a doctor with the unlikely name of Boozer the story of the famous ghost and a related murder trial. Not long after her untimely death, Zona Heaster comes back from the grave and informs her mother that she was the victim of murder. This leads to an unusual trial. Will jurors listen to the testimony of a spirit? We know they will, of course. That's why the Greenbrier Ghost is famous. But McCrumb is at pains to show that the admission of evidence was due not so much to rural superstition as to the popular trend of the day: Spiritualism. This is demonstrated when an older lady, the guest at an elaborate dinner party at Washington and Lee University, cites Arthur Conan Doyle and Cornelius Vanderbilt as authority figures who believe in mediums and such.

The racial aspects of the era provide the most interesting insights, as in this observation of 1930: "The odd thing was that while the world did progress – producing airplanes, telephones... the racial divide seemed to grow wider with each passing year. Ordinary white people suddenly developed their own form of madness..." The dialogue is often unconvincing. Would a humble country girl really refer to a handsome stranger as a "burly Adonis"?

More involving is the story – who could deny the morbid interest of an old-fashioned country autopsy, complete with the horror movie trope of the coffin being slowly raised from the grave?

Brett Taylor

★★★☆☆

Incurable

The Haunted Writings of Lionel Johnson, the Decadent Era's Dark Angel

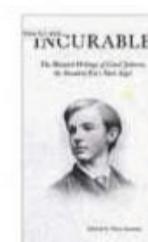
Ed: Nina Antonia

Strange Attractor Press 2018

Pb, 207pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781907222627

Composer of otherworldly poems hampered by clichés and archaisms, an imbiber of absinthe and eau de cologne, smoker of opium and hashish, and rumored student of the occult, dead at

35 as the result of his excesses, Lionel Johnson is the epitome of the *fin de siècle* poet. Described by contemporaries as a "spiritual waif" (he stood at just over 150cm) who "adored the unreal" (George Santayana), Johnson was undone by his fragility and desire to rank among the greatest English poets.



Johnson is exactly the type of poet who could exist only in the Decadent era of late 19th century England. By today's standards he strikes one as horribly pretentious, his legacy burdened by his adherence to the art-for-art's-sake literary fashion exemplified by the *Yellow Book* (1894–97), a periodical to which he contributed. His poems are almost exclusively ornate meditations on nature and dreams, gloomy elegies and turgid odes to England. Flowery adjectives, fragrances, colours, winds, clouds, glades, dells, stars, shadows, Greek and Christian imagery, royalty, melancholy and mortality proliferate.

Despite these limitations, Johnson's poetry may nevertheless interest the modern reader. Editor Nina Antonia heroically attempts to rescue him from his current position as a minor poet most notable for his influence on the early work of WB Yeats and his association with more renowned literary figures such as Oscar Wilde. Johnson, a repressed homosexual, moved in the then-emerging homosexual subculture in London, and most scholars agree that his sonnet 'Destroyer of a Soul' (1892), recounts the affair between Wilde (the destroyer) and Alfred Lord Douglas (the soul), whom Johnson had introduced to Wilde.

This handsome volume from the excellent Strange Attractor Press includes a lengthy, authoritative introduction by Antonia, which provides biographical and critical contexts. Also included are three essays by Johnson, displaying his distinct aesthetics, a handful of photographs, previously unpublished letters and reviews. *Incurable* is an accessible introduction to the work of this minor, yet distinctive, poet.

Eric Hoffman

★★★☆☆

A Robot Man to hold me...

Robot warriors, gilded housemaids and Olympus's automatic doors suggest the ancients' (dodgy?) anticipation of technological developments

Gods and Robots

Myths, Machines, and Ancient Dreams of Technology

Adrienne Mayor

Princeton University Press 2018
Hb, 275pp, illus, bib, ind, \$29.95, ISBN 97806191185446

In this superlative sequel to *Greek Fire* (FT185:61), Adrienne Mayor writes jargon-free prose laced with wit. And kudos to the press for its easy-to-read print; many modern productions need a telescope. Speaking of which, Mayor misses the one imagined in Lucian's comic SF novella *True Story*, a prime example of her book's *leitmotif*: the ancient capacity to visualise technologies not yet invented. This is bolstered by Aristotle's speculations on machines replacing humans, developed by John Stuart Mill and reinforced by the Greek epigram Karl Marx spotted which notes how technology allows slave-girls to sleep in.

Though she goes beyond Graeco-Roman, Mayor gives short shrift to Byzantium (apart from Philon's robot wine waitress), so misses Michael Psellus's description (*Scripta Minora*) of Roman general-cum-thaumaturge Julianus's clay-warrior discharging "unendurable thunderbolts" at the enemy, violating one of Asimov's Four Laws of Robotics.

Nine densely detailed, copiously illustrated chapters are set between Introduction and Epilogue. These bookends are valuable for Mayor's main preoccupations: the ancient distinction between 'made not born' and 'born not made'; correlations between art, myth, and actual technologies; and the ancient anticipation of modern developments. The latter are sometimes strained (e.g. Medea's exsanguinations and potions as harbingers of

blood transfusions), though I relished her comparison of the lamb born in the witch's Rejuvenation Cauldron to the cloning of Dolly the Sheep. Another bonus: Mayor's tracing of robotic *Nachleben* in art, literature, and films, showing a marked preference for *Bladerunner*'s replicants.

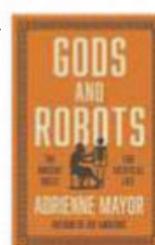
The notorious Russian fraudulent Boris the Dancing Robot might have prompted a section on ancient frauds, though Mayor comes close-ish when itemising the multitude in Lucian's *Lover of Lies*.

Restricted highlights from Mayor's cornucopia:

First, Talos, a prehistoric Robocop who guarded Crete until liquidated by arch-enchantress Medea (whose sadistic techno-killings earn her a separate chapter). His name is preserved in Edmund Spenser's reflections on androids having moral sense and by an American military defence system. Hephaestus's other inventions range from gilded female housemaids to the automated portals of Olympus, ancestors of our automatic garage doors. One of many corollary topics involve the giant 'Nuragic' statues of Sardinia, reminding me of those enigmatic Easter Island edifices.

Mayor surveys ancient efforts to achieve eternal youth and life, noting that one bizarre regeneration involving a broom, best known from Goethe and Disney's *Fantasia*, originated in a Lucian tale.

'Beyond Nature' ranges from ancient prosthetics to 'street drug' equivalents to animatronics experiments to Daedalus's aviation to biotechnology involving Pasiphæ's famous Bull-shagging: how did she breastfeed the Minotaur?



Dædalus recurs, with his living statues and other tricks. Mayor suggests familiarity with heated mercury as a lubricant, also a prefiguring of 1970s 'Uncanny Valley' syndrome.

Prometheus ('Patron Saint of the Proletariat', according to Marxist historian George Thomson) and Pygmalion are conjoined. Mayor fancifully sees his daily liver-pecking as evidence of ancient awareness of that organ's regenerative power. Pygmalion's 'living dolls' sex up the story as forerunners of Soho shops' synthetic playmates. Kate Devlin's *Science, Sex and Robots* (2018) fleshes this out; and what about Captain Kirk's habit of falling in lust with female androids?

Mayor rejects Pandora's standard comparison with Eve for Fritz Lang's Metropolitan malevolent metallic Maria. Her 'Box' is a tralatitian mistranslation of 'Jar' – let's compromise with 'Hope Chest'. Mayor stays neutral in ancient debate over whether Hope was a good or a bad thing.

'Between Myth and History' instances a galaxy of devices from Phalaris's brazen bull for roasting enemies to singing statue Memnon (FT312:17) to Archytas's flying dove, and a mechanical snail complete with slime-trail.

Mayor's concluding sentence ponders what myths our 'Robo-Humanity' will engender and how will they shape our AI creations.

Mayor began with Talos: I'll end with him. Ancient paintings equip him with genitals. Myth grants him the ability to become red-hot. So, woe betide any ancient forerunners of Connie Francis or The Gynslips, who wanted "a Robot Man to hold me tight."

Barry Baldwin



Space Exploration

Past, Present, Future

Carolyn Collins Petersen

Amberley 2019

Pb, 288 pp, illus, refs, £9.99, ISBN 9781445689425

I've been reading about space travel for over 50 years. The subject has grown so much that books usually specialise in one specific sub-topic, such as the early history of the space race, the exploration of the Solar System, the recent boom in private sector space companies, or the prospects for human missions to Mars and beyond. If Carolyn Collins Petersen's book has a USP, it's that it tries to cover all of the above, and more. The result is a brisk, and sometimes vague, skim over the surface of a vast subject. It doesn't come close to being the "handy reference for space fans and professionals alike" that the *Publishers Weekly* suggests, but would make a painless introduction for, say, a teenage SF fan with only a hazy idea of the history and achievements of the real space programme – who may then be inspired to delve more deeply into whichever aspects interested them most.

Andrew May



Creepy Creations

Ken Reid

Rebellion Press 2018

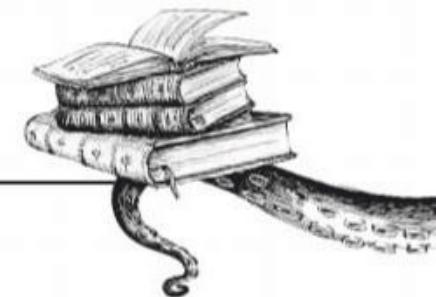
Hb, 96pp, illus, £17.99, ISBN 9781781086605

Ken Reid is best known for his work on *The Beano*, *Dandy*, and the Faceache strip that ran in *Jet* and *Buster*. His mastery of the grotesque is captured in Ken Reid's *Creepy Creations*, a series that first ran in *Shiver and Shake*.

Readers sent sketches to the weekly 'Creepy Creations' competition and Ken brought them to life. The creatures have a fortean feel: 'The Horrible Hobble of Harrow', 'The Fanged Fiend of Finland', lake monsters, imagined spooks, and fictional cryptozoology abound. A nice finishing touch is including the names of the original readers with each illustration. An excellent volume for forteans and fans of British comic history.

Steve Toase





ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

Fantastic Creatures in Mythology and Folklore*Juliette Wood*

Bloomsbury 2018

Pb, 239pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £22.99, ISBN 9781135005925

This timely study (nothing to do with the JK Rowling franchise) focuses on four major groups of mythical creatures: unicorns, mer-folk, winged beasties and dragons. Juliette Wood, a lecturer at Cardiff University, claims to be writing for undergraduates; however, despite her detailed academic research, this book is well-written and accessible even to a casual reader. The origins of each of her classes of creature are examined and explained. Then the social, artistic and literary value of each creature and its legends is followed through the centuries to the present. Of particular interest is her study of how these 'monsters' have been incorporated into the Internet, table-top gaming and computer-based gaming. She shows how our perception of such magical beasts and the core of each myth have remained largely intact despite mass marketing and cyberspace. She also includes an assessment of JK Rowling's tweaks of mediæval monsters, the gateway for young cryptozoologists into the historical world of imaginary fauna. Excellent reading for grown-ups too.

Biographic Einstein & Biographic Tesla*Brian Clegg*

Ammonite Press 2018

Hb, 96pp, ind, £9.99, ISBN 978781453339 & 978781453357

These artful biographies of two scientists use a brilliantly simple idea. Each notable element of their lives, inventions, ideas and writings, and their impact on the world, is presented in infographics – colourful charts, as well as typographical and diagrammatic

ways of comparing things, or showing relationships, lineages, relative quantities and so on. Check out the 16 other 'Bio-graphics' on their website. Such a beautifully simple and attractive method of presenting more facts and less waffle will make such books valued gifts.

Perfect for school libraries or anyone interested in quality graphic presentation and design.

People Must Know The Truth*Jean Herbert Bradley*

www.ashstockwell.co.uk 2018

Pb, 112pp, £6.95, ISBN 97800722348017

Another intensely personal interpretation of UFOs, aliens, vast conspiracies and hidden history of the world, stimulated by the author's own experiences of the Unknown.

It's difficult to know who the audience is for these kinds of book. Nothing here will convince sceptics, and most believers follow their own interpretations. UFO libraries may want a copy because, one day, someone will do their thesis on ufology's outsider constituents who believe they have a mission.

Quacks!**Dodgy Doctors and Foolish Fads throughout History***SD Tucker*

Amberley 2018

Pb, 352pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £14.99, ISBN 9781445671819

Subtitled 'Dodgy Doctors and Foolish Fads throughout History', *Quacks!* is every bit as knowledgeable and entertaining as the author's regular contributions to *FT*. Its six long chapters cover food fads and diets, digestion and bowels, cures for cancer, dietary healing, the Breatharians, and notions of sexual diseases and cures. Naturally, he concentrates on the bizarre, the anomalous, the downright dangerous and the completely lunatic ideas about our bodies and their illnesses, and the even more insane treatments on offer by the world's most indomitable

and weirdest quacks.

It may come as no surprise that many qualified scientists, doctors and surgeons have been "comically demented". It's a wonder anyone survived "throughout history". Tucker's erudition is wide-ranging and his pen is filled with wit (a funny kind of ink). Not sure how hypochondriacs or the mentally fragile will react to these body fluid-filled pages, but more robust readers may get breathlessness from laughing or forehead cramps from persistent eyebrow raising.

Jack the Ripper**The Definitive Casebook***Richard Whittington-Egan*

Amberley 2018

Pb, 512pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £10.99, ISBN 9781445686547

The author is one of the founders of the 'Ripperology' school of investigators, with his own life-long fascination with the identity of Jack – the slaughterer and the legend – and the many theories about his doings in the context of 1880s London. He even claims that, when a boy, he "talked to people who had lived through the Ripper's activities." The claim of "definitive edition" in this case is as accurate as it is possible to be on such a complex subject with many unknowns.

This is the third edition of the 1975 original, hugely corrected, amended and satisfactorily expanded with detailed footnotes and 90 monochrome illustrations.

Whittington-Egan includes assessments of his fellow writers, investigators, theorists and their works; Jack's appearances in literature, films and games; explorations of the various 'diaries', and views of period politicians, policemen, pathologists, historians and reporters. There is also a 'Who's Who' and a history of Dr Nicholas Warren's critical quarterly journal *Ripperiana* (later called *Ripperologist*).

If you need a single trustworthy reference work on the subject this is definitely the one to get.

Paranormal Encounters on Britain's Roads*Peter A McCue*

The History Press 2018

Pb, 176pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9780750984386

Most books with a title like this are restricted to ghostly encounters on the UK's roads and byways; sometimes with a bit of legend (spectral Roman platoons) or mythology (Black Dogs or phantom hitchhikers) thrown in. McCue, a clinical psychologist, modernised the approach, placing it in the context of UFOs and close encounters. Well-referenced and discussed, this fresh approach includes such relevant topics as 'missing time', 'vehicle electrical interference', 'time slips', 'alien big cats' and apparent patterns of 'intelligence'.

Well worth reading by forteans and ufologists.

The Z-Files*The Reverend*

reverendalucard@hotmail.co.uk – 2018

Pb, 108pp, illus, no ISBN or price given

This is how the roaming renegade Reverend puts it: "The Reverend returns for the second cumming. From landed gentry to landless peasant, the roving rector is resurrected from rural retirement. He must hitchhike to Hell and beyond to boldly go where no tramp has gone before. In the guise of a secret agent, beatnik poet, ufologist and Elvis impersonator, his mission is to save mankind. Will our hero dramatically reveal the contents of the Z-Files in time to rescue humanity from the dark forces of the New World Order? This sensational travelogue is undoubtedly a work of award-winning investigative journalism that is certain to win the turnip prize."

That's the flavour of it. Much of this diary of a ufologist and fortean's lift-thumbing adventure across America will probably whiz past the heads of readers outside Oldham. For reasons known only to him, no price or ISBN given. Privately published.

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REVIEWS / FILMS

SEND REVIEW DISCS TO: FILM REVIEWS, FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD, UK.



A tour de force of terror

A new Irish horror movie that, on paper, shouldn't work at all turns out to be a shining beacon of genre film-making that sets the bar high for 2019



The Hole in the Ground

Dir Lee Cronin, Ireland 2019
On UK release from 1 Mar

There are so many horror films being released these days it's virtually impossible for even the most dedicated fan to see them all. Not that anyone in their right mind would *want* to see them all, because the proportion of good to bad is very low; so, when a good one does come along, it shines out like a beacon. *The Hole in the Ground* is one of these.

It tells the story of Annie (Seána Kerslake) and her young son Chris (James Quinn Markey), who have moved to a remote house in rural Ireland to get away from Annie's abusive partner. Before they even arrive, they run into (almost literally) a mysterious hooded figure on the road, muttering incoherently. It turns out to be the deranged wife of their nearest neighbour; Annie learns the woman had a nervous

The film is drenched in an atmosphere of anxiety and dread

breakdown some years before and began claiming that her son was an impostor. Soon, Annie begins suspecting the same of her own boy.

By rights this shouldn't work at all. After all, it's about a mother and child in peril in an isolated house on the edge of a forest. Such elements can be found in innumerable horror films so there's not much originality on show here. However, as if to demonstrate that film-making is not simply about the raw material but also about how that material is handled, director Lee Cronin turns the unpromising story outline into a real *tour de force* of sustained fear. Believe me, *The*

Hole in the Ground is very, very creepy.

The film is drenched in an atmosphere of anxiety and dread: Annie is clearly a troubled young woman, damaged by a previous relationship and fearful of being tracked down by her ex. So, already unsettled, she is further knocked off balance by the encounter with her neighbours. As she descends first into suspicion and then outright paranoia, we are left wondering whether the developing horror is real or the imaginings of a disturbed mind.

As well as this psychological element, there is also a strong visceral one. Some of the images Cronin puts before us really stick in the mind: an old woman's assault on Annie's car; Chris's malevolent performance at a school concert; a violent confrontation in the family home. This is properly gut-wrenching stuff.

In terms of the nuts and bolts,

the film is very well put together. The acting is excellent in what is virtually a two-hander: Seána Kerslake must be in almost every scene, and considering she's acting mainly with a child, and therefore has to do most of the heavy lifting, it's a genuinely impressive effort. The photography is good, the rural Irish locations are well chosen, and the soundtrack music is particularly effective. The film is paced very well and zips along; an hour and a half is the perfect length for this sort of thing.

I can honestly say that it sent shivers down my spine from beginning to end – and that doesn't happen very often to this hardened hack. My only niggles were that a couple of plot points don't make much sense and, as I've mentioned, that it's not particularly original. But that's nit-picking: actually, I reckon that this is already a contender for the best horror film of 2019.

Daniel King



Border

Dir Ali Abbasi, Sweden/
Denmark 2019
On UK release from 8 Mar

Impressive without being particularly likeable, *Border* is an unconventional love story, a police drama, and a demonstration of how mainstream society's rejection of 'outsiders' has tragic and often violent consequences.

Tina (Eva Melander) is a customs officer with the Swedish border agency; she excels at her job because she can literally smell fear, guilt and shame in the travellers who pass by her station. In one early scene she catches a paedophile by sniffing out the disgust and revulsion

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.peterlaws.co.uk)

The Unholy

Dir Camilo Vila, US 1988
Lionsgate Home Entertainment, £14.99 (Blu-ray)



Parents

Dir Bob Balaban, US 1989
Lionsgate Home Entertainment, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

Class of 1999

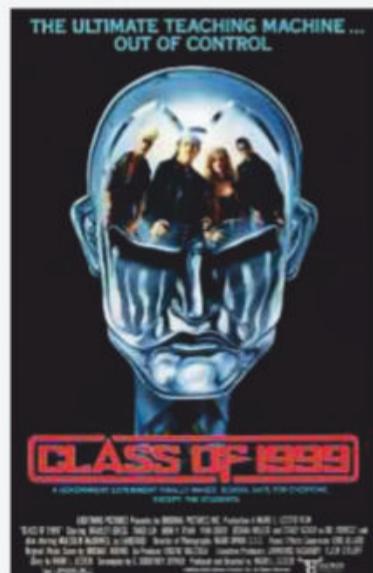
Dir Mark L Lester, US 1990
Lionsgate Home Entertainment, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

I think there's an entire quadrant of my brain whose sole task is to remember old VHS company logos. All those magical hours standing in the video shops of my youth means I've got hundreds of idents stored up there. So forgive me for getting all wistful when I see Vipco, Medusa, Palace, Thorn EMI and... ahhh... Vestron Video, which put out stacks of in-your-face horror throughout the 1980s.

Yet these three re-releases on Blu-ray reminded me that Vestron were never shy about using B-movies to take thoughtful shots at the institutions of the day. Like filling the Catholic church with boobs, blood and hellfire in *The Unholy* (1988). Ben Cross plays a Catholic priest who survives a deadly fall from a tower block. Impressed Vatican bosses reckon the miracle vicar has what it takes to handle St Agnes Church in New Orleans – where the previous two priests were Satanically slaughtered on the altar. The cast is A-list, but the film falls firmly into the B-file. That's no criticism. If you like fellas bursting into flames on crosses, vomiting blood on altars and priests being face-licked by ropey animatronic demons glistening with KY jelly, then you're going to have an absolute hoot with this.

Vestron next aimed their

Stacy Keach solves school discipline problems by installing cyborg teachers



barrels at that other key institution, the all-American family, with a horror-curio packed with pitch-black wit and manic satire. In *Parents* (1989) Michael is a freckled 'gee-mom' kid, living in 1950s suburbia... only, he wonders, why do Mom and Dad keep giggling at each other and sharing sly winks and knowing nods. What's their secret? It's simple. They're cannibalistic psychopaths who fill the

family dinner table with human 'leftovers' each night! They do this as if it's the most natural thing in the world. Most children really do wonder what's going on behind the polite smiles of grown-ups. Especially after dark when the kids have to sleep, but the adults stay up. What are they doing down there? *Parents* answers that question with gusto. What fun it is to take such common childhood curiosity to wild, psychotic extremes.

Vestron jabbed at the education system next, with perhaps the most accessible and high-octane film in this trio. In *Class of 1999* (1990) Stacy Keach plays a mullet wearing, albino tech-exec, who solves teen discipline problems by installing cyborg teachers in his school. Cue delightful scenes of science masters throwing kids through walls, and history professors brutally (and with machine-like rapidity) spanking biker kids till they weep. Whether it's supposed to be a liberal-leaning critique of the over-zealous American school system or a conservative rallying cry to discipline wayward teens is hard to tell. I guess you take your pick. But stuffing *Robocop* and *Escape From New York* into a dystopian *Breakfast Club* makes for a cracking combo of action and schlock.

Vestron's considerable skill with exploitation movies brought them great success, yet by the early 1990s they fell foul of changing tastes. Audiences traded the debauched Vestron 'movies' for the more mature 'films' of studios like Miramax, headed, ironically, by none other than Harvey Weinstein. Sadly, Vestron collapsed – but their hefty catalogue remains, and just a glance at these three titles shows that just because it's a B-movie, it doesn't mean it's dumb. So, here's hoping for more HD re-releases from their extensive warehouse. How about *Deathstalker II* for starters?

emanating from the memory card on his mobile phone. However, Tina is unhappy and lonely: her unconventional looks prevent her from attracting anything but unwelcome attention. Then one day at work she meets Vore (Ero Milonoff), a man whose facial features are very similar to her own, and gradually they develop a relationship. But soon Vore makes a shocking revelation to Tina and events take a sinister turn.

The themes are interesting: the capability for human emotion in an inhuman individual, and the increasing difficulties faced by 'others' in trying to integrate into mainstream society. But as much as one sympathises with Tina, and to a lesser extent Vore, it's difficult to truly warm to the characters; as a result, it's hard to conclude that the film's themes are best served by the way its director has chosen to present them. The film is rather confrontational in the way that it depicts its subject matter – almost daring you to look away at times, particularly during a sex scene – and that challenging approach tends to undercut what is, at heart, a romance.

The two lead performances are exceptional, though, considering the difficulties the actors faced with their heavy prosthetics (nominated for an Oscar in this year's Make Up category), and I also liked the way Scandinavian folklore is incorporated into a very modern story. The film's locations and photography are stunning, as is the way the natural world is depicted. But for all the film's admirable qualities – and there's intelligence and compassion in abundance here – it remains difficult to like or perhaps even to truly enjoy.

Daniel King



Burning Men

Dir Jeremy Wooding, UK 2019
On UK release from 1 Mar

You don't get many British road movies. You don't get many road movies of any kind that use POV camera. You don't get many movies about haunted Black Metal records. And yet *Burning Men* is all three.

Ray (Edward Hayter) and Don (Aki Omoshaybi) are two aspiring musicians in London trying to



raise funds to get to the US to play some gigs. Trawling record fairs, trying to flog their vinyl collection, they come upon an ultra-rare and very valuable disc by an extreme Black Metal band; seeing an opportunity to solve their financial problems at a stroke, they nick it. The film follows them as they drive around the country, picking up tip-offs they hope will ultimately lead them to the buyer they have heard will pay top dollar for their ill-gotten record. All the while, they are being chased by some very nasty looking thugs who want to get the disc back to its rightful owner.

As we all know, road movies are, generally speaking, expansive, sprawling odysseys on the outside, and deeply personal journeys of self-discovery on the inside. As such, many feature impossibly beautiful widescreen shots of jaw-dropping locations, accompanied by scenes of introspection. Eschewing that template, director Jeremy Wooding (who made the shonky but highly entertaining werewolf flick *Blood Moon* a few years back) has made the bold choice to shoot in POV. Bold in the sense of challenging the viewer, that is: not bold for Wooding, who directed the first series of TV sitcom *Peep Show*. This aids the interior journey aspect but, despite some lyrical shots of the British countryside, the literal journey feels more like an energy-sapping drive up north than an odyssey.

Despite being a worthy attempt to strike out and do something new, I'm afraid I can't recommend *Burning Men*. The central idea of a haunted record is daft, so the film has a credibility gap straight away. The plot, such as it is, falls apart in the last 20 minutes or so, to the point that I genuinely didn't know what was going on. The acting is a real mixed bag, with some up-and-coming talent mixing it with a few familiar TV faces who, er, aren't on TV much anymore: the young leads struggle with the script, which calls on them to speak in a way that people in their early 20s do not, while the veterans are given some highly unconvincing characters to play. I did like the music, though, which is by Justin Adams, the guitarist Robert Plant has been using for many years.

Daniel King



The Lego Movie 2

Dir Mike Mitchell, US 2019

On UK release

As far as franchises based on easily marketable merchandise go, the first two Lego movies have pleasantly surprised audiences and critics alike with their high production value and equally witty and wholesome writing.

The worry when such a concept becomes successful and continues to spawn sequels is whether it can maintain its creative and narrative momentum, especially when a new director steps up to the plate. Thankfully, with Phil Lord and Christopher Miller once again providing the script, the latest addition to the Lego cinematic universe proves a worthy continuation of the popular and acclaimed 2014 effort.

Picking up five years from where its predecessor left off, *The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part* delivers an enjoyable animated adventure that will keep both its target viewers and their adult chaperones entertained. Never too dark nor too complicated for the youngest audience members, this child-friendly fare nonetheless contains enough narrative intrigue and pop cultural references to ensure that older fans will enjoy revisiting the cinematic world of Lego come to life.

With the writers well aware of how well received the spin-off *Lego Batman Movie* was, the caped crusader once again gets a significant portion of screen time; however, it's the dynamic between Chris Pratt's Emmet and Elizabeth Banks's Lucy that once again carries the film and cements them as the perfect casting choices for a story that is equally rich both in punny humour and endearing metaphorical life lessons.

The animation is of the same high standard as the previous films, and if there is one criticism to be made of this new toyland adventure, it would be that it's the weakest of the three films released so far. That being said, this latest instalment has substantially more heart and entertainment value than the vast majority of animated family features, ensuring that the laughs keep coming while the story moves along at a comfortable pace.

Leyla Mikelssen



BLU-RAY AND DVD

MURDER SHE WROTE / THE ROCKFORD FILES / COLUMBO

Fabulous, £24.99/£34.99/£34.99 (Blu-ray)

If an alien race studied human culture, they might be surprised by our notions of a cosy afternoon's entertainment, since so many of our classic TV shows revolve around a corpse. There are cadavers aplenty in these first season sets. In *Murder She Wrote*, death-magnet Jessica Fletcher creates crimes at her typewriter, then solves real life murders whenever she's on a break – leading many to think she was a serial killer all along. Indeed, corpses gravitate toward Fletcher, played with eye-popping, campy glee by Angela Lansbury. A BBC Radio 4 survey even found that, statistically speaking, Cabot's Cove (Fletcher's fictional New England seaport home) is the murder capital of the world: translating as a murder rate of 1,490 per million, it's far deadlier than the mean streets of LA. The latter has its share of death too, though, as we see in *The Rockford Files*, starring the laid back James Garner as an ex-con turned private detective who uses his crime world contacts to catch the baddies. Best of all though, is the ingenious *Columbo*, which shocked everybody by turning the murder mystery on its head. Knowing whodunnit from the very start leaves us with plenty of space to simply marvel at the clash of wits between Peter Falk's hapless, downtown detective, and the cultured, uptown killers who walk arrogantly straight into his traps. This special show with a dark edge even managed something unique in TV crime: a sense of mutual respect between cop and killer. Alien observers might frown at our homicidal entertainment choices, but seeing all three murder romps in glorious HD is, humanly speaking at least, a life-affirming treat. **Rev Peter Laws** ★★★★☆

ASSAULT

Network, £12.99 (Blu-ray)

Assault is a police procedural from a period when it was considered acceptable to base your film around the rape and threatened rape of schoolgirls. A dirty old man's movie, then, in which nubile girls in uniform are leered at (not least by the director) and assaulted for your entertainment. The paradox is that by current standards the presentation is merely titillating rather than graphic, but today a film like this probably wouldn't get made at all. It's put together professionally, but the plot has significant holes and implausibilities: some important events occur as the result of the characters being utterly dimwitted, acting in a manner so exasperating that it's difficult to maintain any suspension of disbelief. Good cast though: Suzy Kendall couldn't act for toffee, but Frank Finlay, Tony Beckley and Anthony Ainley definitely could. **Daniel King** ★★☆☆☆

WHO KILLED TEDDY BEAR?

Network, £12.99 (Blu-ray)

Who Killed Teddy Bear? is something of an oddity, which, like *Assault*, deals with stalking and rape. However, it's done in a much more oblique manner and, while still dodgy in the taste stakes, has much to commend it. Sal Mineo plays Lawrence, a young waiter who develops a crush on barmaid/disc jockey Norah (Juliet Prowse), at the nightclub where they both work. Soon, Norah is being plagued by sinister phone calls and believes she is being watched. But is it the smitten Lawrence? Or the police lieutenant assigned to investigate? Or the overbearing nightclub customer whom she recently had thrown out? The film benefits from some moody black and white photography and one or two dreamlike sequences that call to mind Kubrick's early films. Included on the disc is an episode of British TV series *Court Martial*, which also stars Mineo. **DK** ★★★★☆



SOUNDS PECULIAR

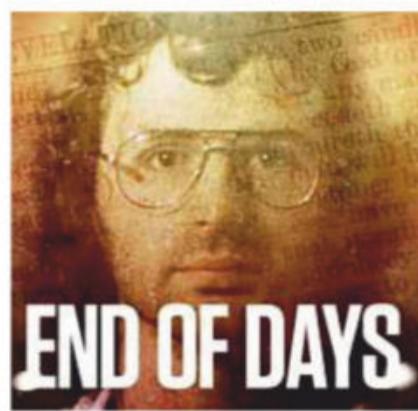
BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called ‘the airwaves’.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore ‘pirate’ pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality ‘spoken word’ content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of ‘legitimate’ broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...



Podcast: End of Days
www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06qc33m
Host: Chris Warburton
Episode Count: Eight
Format: Documentary
Established: October 2018
Frequency: Weekly, all eight episodes available via BBC Sounds App
Topics: The Waco/Branch Davidian Siege of 1993

After the 1978 tragedy at Jonestown (which claimed over 900 victims), the 1993 siege at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, is probably one of the best-known American cult tragedies (with the Heaven’s Gate UFO cult mass suicide not far behind).

Anyone around at the time – over 25 years ago now – no doubt recalls the all-pervasive news coverage of the ATF (US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms) assault and the subsequent fire that claimed

79 lives. What’s less well remembered is the number of British citizens involved: over 30 had moved from the North of England to Texas to join the cult, and 24 of them lost their lives.

It’s the British angle that drives the eight-part BBC Sounds podcast series *End of Days*, presented by Chris Warburton. Investigative journalist Warburton’s first BBC podcast series was 2017’s *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, built around the oft-explored Michael Peterson murder case. In *End of Days*, he follows the British victims of David Koresh’s Christ complex, bringing life to those who died, and talking with their relatives and survivors.

It’s a mosaic approach, presented in chronological order, examining how the British participants got involved and what happened after the tragedy. As with much modern documentary making, Warburton and producer Ciaran Tracey often foreground the process of researching and producing the podcast, bringing the listener in on the leads they follow to uncover events from 25 years ago.

Koresh – who believed himself to be the second coming of Christ – gathered a group of almost 100 believers at Mount Carmel

in Waco, Texas, in the early 1990s and began stockpiling weapons in anticipation of Armageddon. After a scene-setting introductory episode, *End of Days*’ second instalment ‘Crowded House’ explores how in 1988 Koresh recruited British participants from Manchester, London, and Nottingham, drawing largely upon black Caribbean families who were part of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. It’s an angle on the Waco incident not widely explored.

After a couple of episodes of travelogue, exploring Waco and the background of Koresh and the Branch Davidians, the fifth episode, ‘Under Siege’, details the events that precipitated the tragedy, which unfolded on televisions around the world in 1993. An initial confrontation between the Branch Davidians and the FBI saw six cultists and four agents die, leading to a 51-day siege at the site. Much of that time was occupied by detailed scriptural debates between Koresh and the FBI over the phone.

The sixth instalment, ‘Blind Faith’, takes a close look at life inside the cult compound and what was happening outside during the nearly three months that the siege dragged on. Drawing copiously on archive material and the recollections of survivors and participants,

the episode leads up to the 19 April 1993 assault on the compound and the devastating fire that resulted in the final huge death toll. There is still plenty of dispute about how this was started (see Leigh Neville, “We Didn’t Start the Fire, **FT133:34-38**”).

The last two episodes follow the inquest in the UK, focusing on the British victims, before taking a look at what goes on at the Mount Carmel site today, including how people remember the Waco event – including those keeping the memory of Koresh alive; for some, it is not yet over. These episodes also examine the impact that the Waco incident has had on people’s lives in both the US and the UK.

Overall, if you have ever been curious about the details of what exactly happened back in 1993 in Waco, *End of Days* is the podcast you’ve been waiting for. It deliberately puts the focus on the victims, especially those from the UK, rather than opting for the usual emphasis on Koresh, the cult’s charismatic leader; this, along with so many other aspects of its approach, makes for a very refreshing and informative listen.

Strengths: A fresh take on a complex subject, with a particularly welcome emphasis on the UK aspect.

Weaknesses: The ‘inside baseball’ chat on how the research was conducted is probably an unnecessary flourish, especially in episodes three and four.

Recommended Episodes: You need to listen to all eight to get the full story (each is around 30 minutes in length), but if time is tight, hit Episode 5 ‘Under Siege’ and Episode 6 ‘Blind Faith’ for the main events of the siege. If you are interested in the less well known material dealing with the UK side, then you should definitely listen to the early episodes.

Verdict: A dark subject tackled in a serious way, and offering a new angle on the tragic events.

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LETTERS

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Wolves in England

I was very interested to read John Reppion's feature 'The Last Wolf in England' [FT375:50-53]. A while ago I came across a story of a dead wolf found in Scotland in 1811 as reported in the *Cheshire General Advertiser* (27 April 1811):

"There was lately found at Tyringham, near Dunbar, the dead body of a large Wolf. There were several wounds on its head, and a cut on its neck, and from the appearance of the body it had long been dead. It was immediately skinned and stuffed, and is in good preservation. The colour is light, dusky yellow, a black ridge down the back, and nearly white in the belly and the breast. It has a sharp snout, erect ears, strong foreparts and a bushy tail. The length from the snout to the tip of the tail is 6 feet [1.8m]. The legs are shorter than usually described. It is conjectured the creature has been on board some of the vessels lately wrecked on the coast."

I also found a note from Mark Carwardine's *The Guinness Book of Animal Records* (1995, p.42) that the last wolf in Scotland was killed as late as 1848.

Richard Muirhead

Macclesfield, Cheshire

Hardly withering

Inevitably, the title and text of Andrew May's article on scepticism and belief in Shakespeare [FT376:53] quoted "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy". The line from Hamlet frequently crops up both in conversation and in Shakespeare's successors - films and TV series - when someone is warned against the hubris of taking a sceptical attitude towards whatever gods, ghosts or spooky goings-on there are in the script. All it means is: "Well, you don't know everything" - but, being Shakespeare, it sounds a lot classier. Obviously there are more things that exist than could be imagined by a mediæval Danish courtier (like the germ theory of disease or electric light), but even today it is hardly a withering put-down. No sceptic would doubt that there are lots of things we don't know, but

SIMULACRA CORNER



Giraffe cosy

Richard Paul-Jones found this 'Giraffe Cozy' up the road from his house in Lauzerte, Tarn et Garrone, southwest France. It is a companion picture for the 'tree giraffe' [FT373:71]. Richard commented: "It was suggested that it is actually a dinosaur in camo, but that would just be silly."

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

the way we know things is based on evidence, not on wishing they were true or dreaming they might be. In contrast, believers in the supernatural will claim to know things despite, or sometimes even because of, a lack of evidence.

Martin Stubbs

London

Abel's japes

Your obituary of the champion American hoaxter Alan Abel [FT376:28-29] was very entertaining. Yetta Bronstein, the fictitious Jewish grandmother from the Bronx impersonated by Abel's wife, ran for President in 1964 and again in 1968. Her campaign slogan was actually "Vote for Yetta and watch things get better". One of her pledges was to arrange the printing of a postage stamp bearing the nude likeness of Jane Fonda "to give a little pleasure for six cents to those who can't afford

Playboy magazine."

Bruce Felton tells us: "[Abel] once lured several wary State Department and FBI officials and more than 150 reporters to a lavish wedding reception for Ugandan strongman Idi Amin at New York's Plaza Hotel. The 'groom' was a 260-pound look-alike in a rented military uniform; his 'bride' was blonde and eighteen. 'I thought it would be nice to give him a haven in the United States - make him a citizen by having him marry a WASP,' Abel explained." (*The People's Almanac Presents The 20th Century*, Ed. David Walchinsky, 1999, p.860).

Edward Young

London

Missing fingers

Regarding the archaeological report 'Giving The Finger' [FT376:14], one possibility might be that the "missing" fingers were

simply partly folded under, possibly for some symbolic reason we have no way of discovering, or perhaps as a form of signature. If the handprints do represent maimed hands, it could be due to a ritual of some kind, as suggested; the photo appears to illustrate two left hands with the "least useful" fingers missing - although that assumes that the palm was towards the rock wall, which we can't know for sure. Perhaps a concluding part of the ritual was to create an imprint of the hand, which could explain the large number of such images. It would be interesting to establish if the majority of maimed hands showed the same pattern as those in the photo, which would add some weight to this theory.

If the making of handprints was restricted to certain individuals, this might also account for the number of maimed hands portrayed. If the chief, for example, was traditionally the only one who made handprints, and he or she was also required to sacrifice a finger in times of crisis, you would expect to see a lot of maimed hands over the centuries.

Dave Miles

By email

Ian Fleming

I've just been browsing through the letters of Ian Fleming, collected by Fergus Fleming in *The Man with the Golden Typewriter* (Bloomsbury, 2015). A couple of news items caught my eye: In 1958, Fleming visited the Seychelles on journalistic business for the *Sunday Times*. He noticed this in the local paper: "Regina v. Archangel Michel (Indecent Assault)". "What do you make of that?" he wrote. What indeed?

In February 1961, back at his Jamaican villa for the annual stint of Bondage, he noticed a "good misprint" in the local *Gleaner* newspaper: "Not to be sartorially outdone, the bride-groom wore an orchid in his bottomhole." I wonder if the reporter had just seen *Carry On Nurse* (1959), which concludes with Wilfrid Hyde-White having his rectal thermometer replaced by a daffodil?

Barry Baldwin

Calgary, Alberta

LETTERS

The Nazi Mind

I read the excellent article on gingerbread houses [FT374:32-39] the same day I finished the powerful BBC series on Auschwitz (available on Netflix). I had previously wondered how much subconscious impact the dark elements of German folklore had had in developing minds. After the article, with its story of resolving the evil of the witch by incinerating her in an oven, I saw a parallel in the strangely fixed, almost hypnotically induced and unquestioning accounts of the SS workers who said the incineration of the 'Jewish filth' in the ovens was right and necessary to protect the German people from destruction.

Dr David Reilly
Kinloss, Moray

Drunken visions?

It is often asserted that drinking, even moderately, makes you see things that aren't there. This is commonly trotted out in news reports alongside "...and I hadn't touched a drop!" However, I've never seen or heard *any* evidence to link a pint of beer or tot of rum to paranormal activity. Where and when was it first suggested? English folklore? Antiquity? Nineteenth century temperance writers attempting to discredit Spiritualists?

Janet Wilson
Bristol

Cat mimics

In response to Stefan Badham's letter regarding cats mimicking vocalisations from other animals [FT373:71], I have witnessed similar incidents close to home. Our cat Pippin always greets us



Timothy Young

Saratoga, Wyoming

I agreed with almost all of Zoë-Dawn Anderson's letter on autism and changelings [FT374:74], as I also have noticed how

with the same playfully exaggerated "hello" by which we address him, while his brother Merry, a lover of home comforts, very often makes a sound approximating to "dinner". My tongue isn't entirely in my cheek here... I'm reminded of a video on YouTube of an Alaskan malamute, on hearing an approaching ice cream van, getting excited and making a sound that can only be described as Scooby Doo shouting "Ice cream!" It's worth tracking down if only for the beauty of the animal.

Barry Metcalfe
By email

Changelings

I really enjoyed Joshua Cutchin's exploration of changelings [FT373:30-37]. There was one thing that struck me in particular about the historical physical descriptions of changelings: "Pale, wrinkled skin as that of an old person... A withered, little, living skeleton of a child." Large heads, thin limbs, and so on. I couldn't help thinking of Progeria Syndrome, the genetic condition that presents as the appearance of premature aging in children. Is it possible that at least some documented changelings were actually just children suffering from a then unknown and therefore completely misunderstood genetic condition? I feel this should be included in discussions of changeling lore, especially in light of the fact that "in 19th century Ireland, there were several recorded changeling killings." Could the families and communities of these poor children have killed them, thinking they were evil or mischievous fairy spawn that had taken the place of their 'true' child?

the actions of the changeling resemble the change in autistic children at about 18 months and which has become the anti-vaxxer's war cry (see pp16-17). However, the assertion that Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is a dubious therapy is not borne out by the 50 years of empirical research behind it. The idea that ABA is about changing a child to become the child they once were is a bias that high-functioning autistic adults believe to be the case always – ironic in a disorder with spectrum in the title.

What ABA does for my son is to attempt to stop him from hurting himself, to help him learn and continue to learn and to communicate and socialise as best as he can. If this is abhorrent to Ms Anderson then I am sorry; however, suggesting that we don't accept or appreciate our son is unwarranted. Just because it feels like the "ghost" child has been taken from us, and there is some pain and mourning there, doesn't mean that we will not love, respect and help the "real" child, who is gorgeous.

James Golbey
By email

Mistletoe

For over three generations my family related mistletoe and ivy being allowed in Methodist churches, most chapels, but not larger churches. Allegedly this has nothing to do with flammability or pagan connotation and a lot to do with long-suffering cleaners and helpers. Methodist churches and small chapels tend to have frugal, sparse décor/textiles, less lime render, and more plain timbers. They wipe down easily. Mistletoe berries, and the green/ochre powdery mould so frequently found on ivy and mistletoe, are almost impossible to clean from velvet, carpet, corduroy wool or linen – and can trigger asthmatic reaction. My grandmother recalls her mother "banning" things from the house and church services that meant extra domestic work for her and other spouses of clergy. Later, sweets and gum were also maligned; try removing beechnut gum from prayer cushions.

Mistletoe, according to a great-great aunt, could be used medicinally by the initiated in very small doses. It had to be expertly distilled and then diluted. It could be turned into a tincture-like 'wine'. Along with juniper (gin) and yew berry flesh it was to be administered to women at risk of sepsis and complications after abortion or miscarriage. She maintained it affected oestrogen, having a progesterone-similar characteristic. This, the ladies of her generation believed, could be utilised with other methods to manage ovulation and plan or avoid pregnancy. People told her when she was young (late 1800s) that this was why it grew on trees related to making alcohol, and was put up at party time. Alcohol and partying, trysts in woods, promiscuous kisses – all could ruin a woman in reputation and fate. Mistletoe, because it was related to 'female' ailments and worshipped as a prehistoric contraceptive aid, was kissed beneath because it would keep you 'safe', i.e. hygienic and not pregnant at random.

To my resigned horror I learnt a friend with blood pressure issues was told this summer, by a paid practitioner of dangerous misinformation in Glastonbury, to consume sap from mistletoe berries as a 'herbal cure'. It would work: your blood pressure problems would vanish rapidly as you expired.

Lucy Brown
Pilton, Somerset

Psychosocial

Peter McCue ['The Cosmic Joker' FT376:30-35] critiques the psychosocial hypothesis (PSH) as arrogantly assuming that *all* cases would yield to a conventional explanation. Let's consider it for a moment in reference to UFOs. Since the beginning of the modern phenomenon in 1947, many hypotheses have been proposed to explain UFOs, mainly the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH). Unfortunately, up to now not a single UFO case has been proved to be of extraterrestrial origin. Advocates of alternative hypotheses have finally been forced to accept, more or less reluctantly,



that a majority (as high as 90-95 per cent) of the raw cases do have a psychosocial explanation.

McCue considers Ferrol and Coleman's PSH claims about black-eyed kids (BEK) to be questionable just because one researcher says, on one page of one of his books, to have found BEK accounts that predate the Internet, without giving any example. There are probably hundreds of abduction accounts in the literature that allegedly predate Budd Hopkins's *Missing Time* book, but they have *always* surfaced later. In the BEK case, the 1975 US film *The Stepford Wives* includes robot women with all-black eyes, a clear precedent.

Regarding the Gáldar case, the link for the sceptical explanation McCue provides no longer works. Ballester Olmos, Ricardo Campo and Manuel Borraz, the main Spanish sceptical investigators, have published extensively on the case and even identified the SSBN 632 *Von Steuben* as the submarine that launched two Poseidon missiles that night. Unfortunately, almost nothing has yet appeared in English, but the comments by Oberg and Ricardo Campo in the blog entry here should provide some context: www.openminds.tv/canary-islands-mass-ufo-sighting-1976/38122#comment-68510. (See also ‘Navy Missile Test and the Canary UFOs’ by Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos and Ricardo Campo Pérez. *IUR*, vol 29, No. 4, 2005, pp. 3-9.)

As usual among believers, Dolan's version of the case glosses over the more inconvenient details. For example, the military officer charged with the investigation of the incident was quite open-minded and even tried to enlist the help of the local UFO group – Instituto Canario de Parapsicología – to hypnotise both witnesses. Fortunately (for them), neither of the witnesses agreed to go under hypnosis. In his final report on the incident, the officer explains: "Considering the conflicting testimonies of two other witnesses – one inside the vehicle and the woman at the farmhouse, who only saw a luminous phenomenon far away in the sky – I had no grounds to

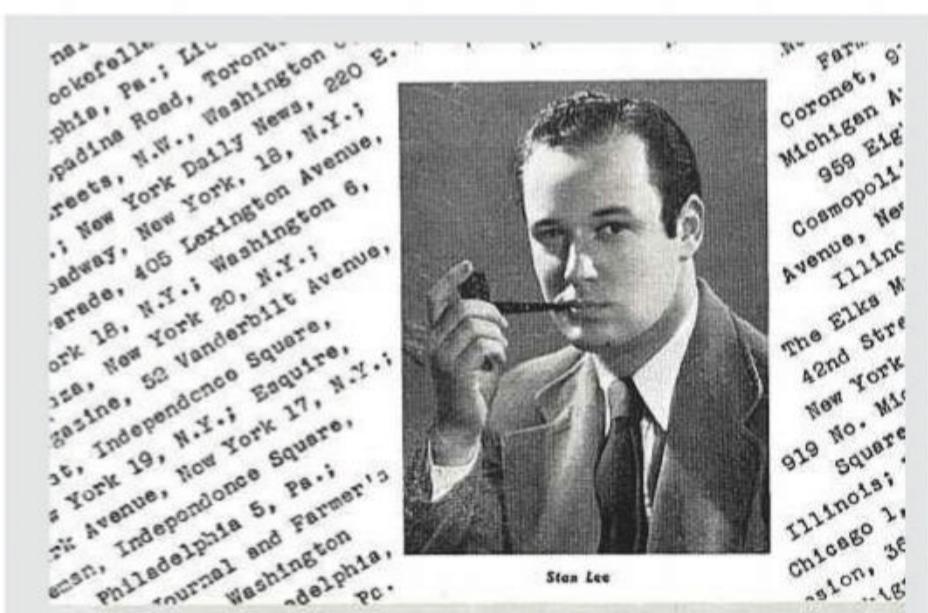
continue my investigation".

So, once again, we have hundreds of testimonies about a luminous phenomenon in the night sky that might be definitely explained as Poseidon missiles and, coincidentally, a couple of people who described unmoving 10ft (3m) tall beings inside a transparent UFO that suddenly expanded to an incredible size (something almost never reported in UFO literature). Which hypothesis is simpler: aliens, tricksters, or a temporary pareidolia of the bluish and reddish gases expelled during the ascending flight of the missiles, as seen by many other witnesses of the same phenomenon?

The idea that the phenomenon is a series of orchestrated theatrical performances is nothing new. Martin Kottmeyer even wrote about it in an article entitled “Break a leg – The UFO experience as theatre” (*Magonia* 27, Sept 1987). He clearly pointed to an insurmountable obstacle for the existence of an external intelligence: The Problem of No Contact. In the 21st century, the naïve ETH has been mainly discarded but, instead of surrendering, paranormal believers have fought back with new convoluted theories like Jose Caravaca’s Distortion Theory, Joshua Cutchin’s *Thieves in the Night* or Peter McCue’s Cosmic Joker. The idea that an ‘absurdity’ factor might be intentionally built into the ‘performances’ is a logical fallacy: it is absurd, therefore it is real. I could live with a resourceful and perpetual prankster (not so different really from the Christian God), but when modern proponents point to higher motives, they fall flat. To pretend that this higher intelligence uses such ‘performances’ just to hint that it could intervene in a big way if we go too far is illogical, as well as clearly ineffective, as the author himself acknowledges.

As far as I am concerned, all those overlap cases McCue mentions do point to a common manipulative and deceptive intelligence behind seemingly different types of paranormal phenomena; our own.

phenomena: our
Luis R González
Spain



>> THERE'S MONEY IN COMICS!

By Stan Le

Stan the Man

I enjoyed your pieces regarding the achievements and legacy of Stan Lee [**FT375:30-31**]. The Necrolog entry was (of course) informative and the editorial was touching, but I thought your masthead [**FT375:2**] for that issue was an especially suitable – and subtle – nod to ‘The Man’.

Nicely done FT
Graham Mullins
Orpington, Kent

The above picture of comics supremo Stan Lee, aged 25, appeared in *Writer's Digest* in November 1947. I found it reproduced in Marshall McLuhan's book *The Mechanical Bride* (1951). The same book has also preserved for eternity the analagraph, possibly the worst named product ever. This has nothing to do with our excretory functions... it's a personal economy planner.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway



Imperfect Peterson

While I respect Merrily Harpur's leaping to Jordan Peterson's defence [FT375:74], I would like to point out that he is not perfect, having briefly shown support for cosmic serpent theories – the Ancients knew the structure of DNA, just look at Asclepius's Rod! That's not just how snakes look while they're mating etc – and then backing away from the whole farrago. That's how the whole of Jungian therapy works anyway, so the confusion is understandable. Peterson would be the first to admit that there are epistemological problems within psychology, as pseudoscientific ideology often has to fight it out with evidence-based medicine. His stand against the legal enforcement of gender-neutral pronouns in Canada is nonetheless inspirational, and his calm dissection of the collapse of British society on *Question Time* will always be close to my heart.

James Wright

Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

More weight!

Kate Eccles points out that during the Salem Witch Trials, Giles Corey refused to plead and was subjected to *peine forte et dure* – the traditional method used under English law to persuade a prisoner to plead innocent or guilty so the trial could go ahead [FT374:71]. In Miller's *The Crucible*, Elizabeth Procter tells her husband that Giles refused to speak "so his sons will have the farm. It is the law, for he could not be condemned a wizard without he answer the indictment, aye or nay" – (although in fact, according to Wiki, "Despite Corey's efforts to protect his estate by refusing to plead, George Corwin still attempted to extort money from Corey's heirs after the witch trials. In 1710, Corey's daughter Elizabeth and her husband John Moulton filed a lawsuit seeking damages from Corwin. Her statement to the court read, 'After our father's death the sheriff threatened to seize our father's estate and for fear thereof we complied with him and paid him eleven pound six shillings in money'").

The idea that a refusal to plead ensured that your family would inherit your estate applied to any kind of accusation,



The MAN with the IRON MASK.
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The Masked Walker

I found this strange postcard in an album when clearing my mother's house. The rest were mostly postcard views of Wales, other than a couple from Oz.

Mary Worrall *By email*

Editor's note: Mary Worrell's email arrived as we were preparing Jan Bondeson's first feature on hyperpedestrians [FT376:36-41]; Jan's follow-up, revealing the full story behind the mysterious 'Masked Walker' shown in the postcard, will appear in our next issue.

not just to witchcraft. In England in 1605 Walter Calverley, who killed two of his children, possibly in a fit of madness, refused to plead and was pressed to death, helped by his friends, who jumped on the pressing boards to speed up the process with the encouragement of Sir Walter himself – "All you who love Sir Walter, loup [leap] on! loup on!"

Giles's last defiant words were also reported as: "More rocks!" and "Damn you. I curse you and Salem!" – which was certainly in character for Giles, who had a violent temper, and had beaten one of his indentured servants

to death. Interestingly 'More weight' was apparently the traditional reply to the question as to whether the victim was at last prepared to plead (most of them were eventually). Milton, in his verses on the death of a Carrier at Oxford, writes:

"His leisure told him that his time was come. / And lack of load made his life burdensome. / That even to his last breath (there be that say't), / As he were press'd to death, he cried, 'More weight,' [meaning more cargo for his carrier's cart.]"

I do hope Giles, even if he gave the traditional answer at the

last, also had time for his defiant: "Damn you, I curse you and Salem!"

Tina Rath
London

Sandling scarecrow

Following Theo Paijmans's article on the Sandling Road Horror [FT374:30-31] and Richard George's follow up letter [FT376:73], I am writing to add a little to this debate.

The 'UFO investigator' Chris Rolfe (wrongly named in the article as Chris Wolfe) interviewed one of the principal witnesses in one of the multiple reports of the headless bat-winged 'monster' some years later and was told that they now realised that what they had seen was in fact a scarecrow lit from behind by ambient light, no doubt creating a weird silhouette.

In response to Richard George's question re fault lines in the area: there is one running down the line of the Channel responsible for a number of Kent earthquakes over the years, including the 2007 one which had its epicentre just offshore at Folkestone. However, I see no reason to invoke earthlights to explain the phenomena reported.

The road between Brockhill School and the railway station and bus stop to which the teenagers were probably heading after school on those dark winter evenings has a long history of more conventional ghost stories. The woods around are dark and it is easy to imagine teenagers, perhaps afraid of the dark, trying to scare each other and themselves making sense of unexpected or odd stimuli in dramatic fashion.

Apart from the scarecrow admission mentioned earlier, I can add that a friend and I were startled twice in the same location by 'strange phenomena'. On the first occasion by the flickering of the lone streetlight at the 'haunted' Slaybrook Corner, which turned out to be caused by a bat fluttering around the light presumably hunting insects attracted to the bulb. The second occasion saw us transfixed by a white blob moving about in a field that eventually came towards us. At the last minute it resolved itself into a white marking on the nose of a curious pony!

Paul Harris
Folkestone, Kent

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

Ghost train

In the long hot summer of 1976, I was seven and my friend Leslie was eight or nine. We lived in the Marton area of Blackpool in Lancashire. One day, tightly holding hands, we scrambled up the steep British Rail embankment, our path choked by brambles and weeds. Leslie yelled as a thorn bush encircled her ankle, tripping her and causing pin-pricks of blood to appear on her white socks. After attempting to free her, I felt the familiar tingle of nettle stings. We continued to climb, determined to investigate the highest point of the embankment at the rear of our adjoining homes (in Westbank Avenue and Eastbank Avenue).

Rising high above the ordinary row of terraced houses, the seemingly perpendicular hill had been tempting us all summer, as we had been forbidden to play there. We had marvelled at the bigger boys who had stolen wirecutters from the nearby allotments and watched jealously as almost every afternoon they disappeared together through the hole they had snipped in the fence.

On reaching the brow of the embankment, we stopped to catch our breath and consider our surroundings. We wandered down a cinder path, stopping periodically to gather small posies of clover, daisies and buttercups until boredom got the better of us. We thought it was perhaps time to head home when we spied a great, grey cloud on the horizon. It appeared to be heading towards us at an alarming rate. We exchanged worried glances as we became aware of a deep rumbling sound accompanied by a shrill whistle, then the grinding of cogs and gears.

Falling to the ground, I was roughly thrust aside by a powerful rush of air. Hurtling by was a magnificent, green steam locomotive followed by three shabby but still elegant carriages. It huffed and puffed along the embankment, chugging out coal soot and steam. Leslie, being



"We spied a great, grey cloud on the horizon. It appeared to be heading towards us at an alarming rate"

the older, gently took my arm and guided me back down the steep grassy slope. gingerly stepping back through the wire railings, we were met by an irate group of our parents and neighbours. As we began describing what we had witnessed, we were met with incredulity. My father stopped us in mid-flow. Taking us to one side, he patiently rationalised why our account was preposterous. Steam engines had been replaced by diesel many years previously, trains had ceased to run along that particular (Marton) line in 1964 and by 1970 the tracks had been removed.

There is also an uncanny postscript. Leslie and I were convinced we had been exploring for no more than an hour at most, but according to our respective parents we had been missing for the best part of the day; hence the search party.

The track bed of this old rail route is now 'Yeadon Way' (A5230), the main road out of Blackpool leading to the M55 motorway. The particular stretch of embankment we climbed overlooked a pub called The Welcome Inn, now known as The Cherry Tree. I often wonder if anyone else has witnessed the phantasmagorical phenomenon of the spectral ghost train.

Deborah Contessa Hargreaves
By email

La Llorona

Reading James Riley's "The Curse of the Crying Woman" [FT373:49], I was reminded of visits we've made to my wife's uncle in Mexico City. Licenciado Rafael Davila Bengoa was a lawyer and politician in the capital and had an office in a Spanish colonial house in the old part of town. While we were there we heard one of the guards talking about hearing La Llorona (the wailing woman of Mexican legend) the previous night. He was on duty just before midnight and was sitting just inside the gate when he heard the sound of someone crying outside on the cobbled street. He knew the legend, but the sound was so

realistic that he went outside to look. There was nothing obvious, but the sound of weeping continued, came towards him and passed him. He said that if it had been a real person he could have touched her. Over the years other people had heard the crying woman, but the story in that area was connected to a local convent where one of the nuns had given birth and lost her child. During the rest of her life she would wander the streets, crying, trying to find her baby.

Peter Birchwood
Montgomery, Powys

Translucent shrew

In 1997 my partner Steve and I went to our usual venue in the Lake District for a camping holiday, staying at our favourite site not far from Castlerigg stone circle. After several days of up hill and down dale, we repaired to our tent, which because of the popularity of the campsite (it was cheap), we had to pitch somewhere other than our usual spot, and were next to a dry-stone wall, with sheep on the other side. Our neighbouring campers were a little boisterous, with quite a large family, but by the time we had visited the nearby hotel for a spot of sustenance and a couple of drinks, the kids were asleep. Opening a bottle of plonk, we sat at the mouth of our tent and recalled the day's events as we watched the sunset.

It was then that we saw our interloper. It was small, shrew-sized and shaped, yet we could see the grass through it as if it were made of smoke, or just a shadow; yet it could not have been the latter as even while it circled Steve's legs, we could see the sheen on its fur. After about a minute, it shot back out into the open. It wasn't a figment of our imagination, since we were both able to see it and comment on its movements. We were certainly not drunk. It was early evening and still quite light.

Sally Jordan-Kidd
Bretton, Cambridgeshire

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To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: **1 MAR 2019**. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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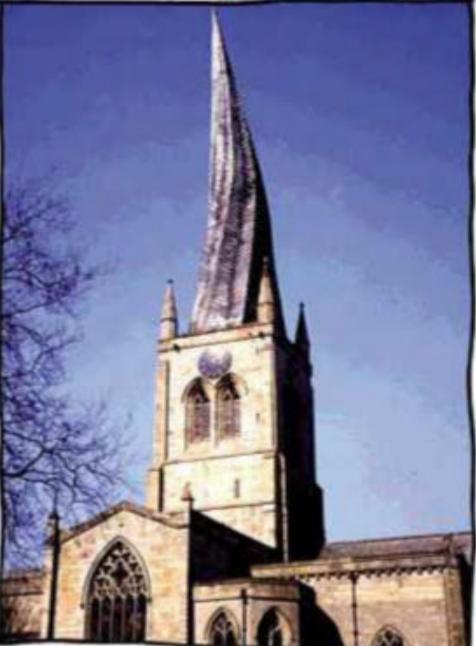
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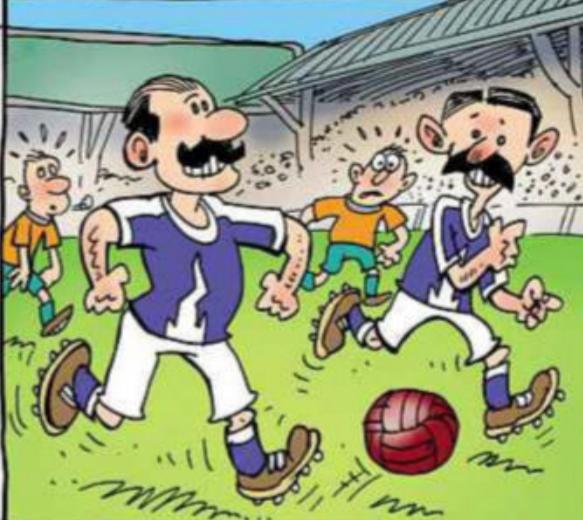
CHESTERFIELD
SPIRE

HUNT EMERSON & ROB GANDY

ST. MARY AND ALL-SAINTS CHURCH IN CHESTERFIELD, DERBYSHIRE, IS FAMOUS FOR ITS CROOKED SPIRE!



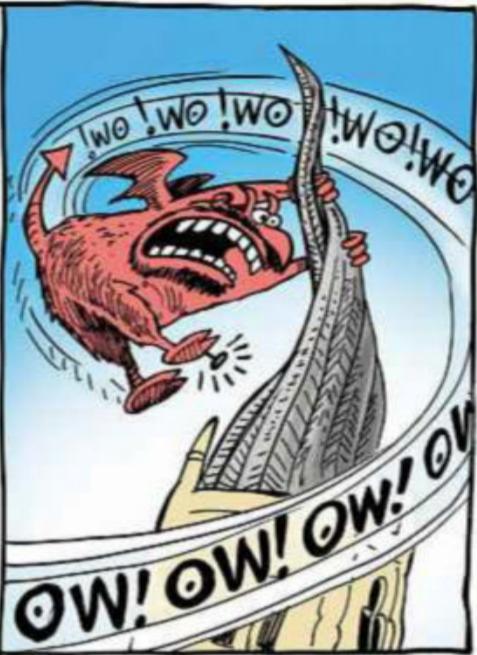
THE TOWN IS VERY PROUD OF IT, WITH THE LOCAL FOOTBALL TEAM BEING NICKNAMED "THE SPIREITES"!



LEGEND HAS IT THAT THE DEVIL WAS HAVING HIS HOoves RE-SHOD IN NEARBY BOLSOVER WHEN THE BLACKSMITH HIT A NAIL RIGHT INTO HIS FOOT!



THE PAIN MADE THE DEVIL LEAP THROUGH THE AIR IN PAIN! PASSING OVER CHESTERFIELD, HE SWUNG ON THE CHURCH SPIRE TO BREAK HIS FALL!



AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION SAYS THAT A VIRGIN WAS ONCE MARRIED IN THE CHURCH, AND THE BUILDING WAS SO SURPRISED THAT THE SPIRE TURNED AROUND TO LOOK AT THE BRIDE!



THE LEGEND ALSO SAYS THAT IF ANOTHER VIRGIN FROM CHESTERFIELD MARRIES IN THE CHURCH, THE SPIRE WILL STRAIGHTEN UP AGAIN!



OF COURSE, THERE MIGHT BE OTHER EXPLANATIONS... IT MIGHT BE A UFO LAUNCH PAD...



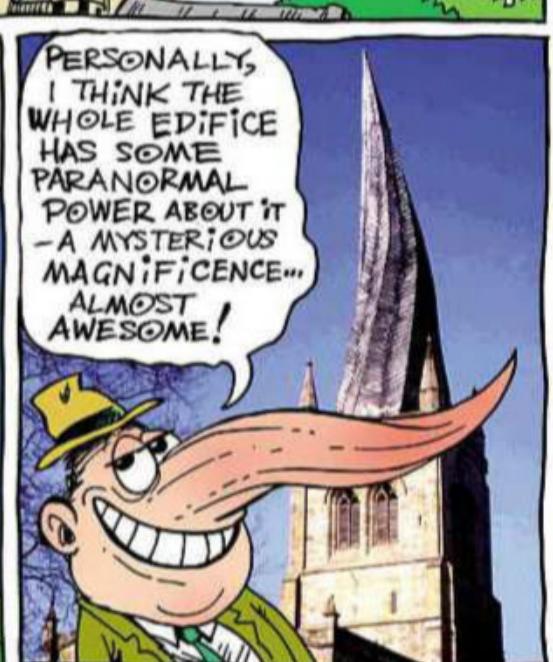
THE BORING EXPLANATION IS THAT THE SPIRE IS CROOKED BECAUSE OF THE USE OF UNSEASONED TIMBER AND A LACK OF CROSS-BRACING...



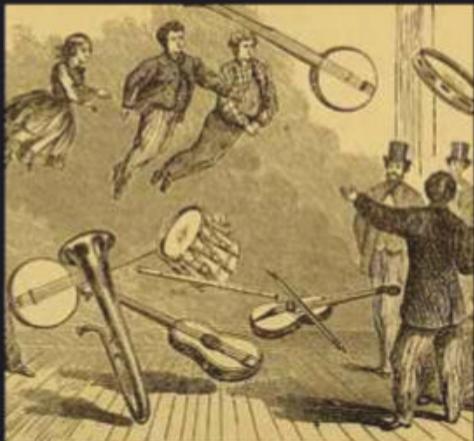
IT THEREFORE warped over time as the lead on the south side expanded more quickly than that on the north side...



PERSONALLY, I THINK THE WHOLE EDIFICE HAS SOME PARANORMAL POWER ABOUT IT - A MYSTERIOUS MAGNIFICENCE... ALMOST AWESOME!



COMING NEXT MONTH



LITTLE LEVITATORS

FLYING CHILDREN AND
TELEPORTING TODDLERS



THE MASKED WALKER

THE HYPERPEDESTRIAN
HOAXER IN THE IRON MASK



CASPIAN TIGERS,
YETI FINGERNAILS,
BREXIT BIZARROS,
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 378

ON SALE 28 MAR 2019

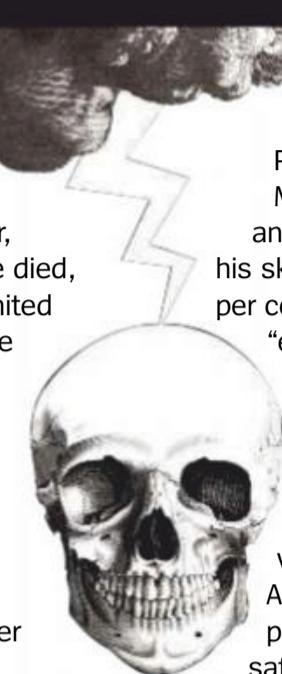
STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

On 16 July 2016, Maxwell Bates-Spiers, 39, a father of two from Canterbury described as a conspiracy theorist and paranormal researcher, died suddenly in Warsaw. Before he died, he ran a high temperature and vomited two litres of black liquid. A message from his phone sent to his mother Vanessa Bates shortly before his death stated: "Your boy's in trouble, if anything happens to me, investigate." He was allegedly probing into the lives of well-known figures in politics, business and entertainment. To add a further layer of paranoia, his laptop computer had been wiped clean of data before being returned to his family. His body was returned to England more than a week after he died.

An inquest was finally held in Sandwich, Kent, in January 2019. Monika Duval, a publisher and fellow conspiracy buff in whose Warsaw flat Spiers had died, said that the two of them had come to Poland from a holiday in Cypress, where they had bought "eight to 10" boxes of the Turkish form of Xanax (a drug to treat anxiety) from a doctor's surgery, at a cost of about £315. Back in Poland, Spiers addressed a conference in April 2016. On the night he died, he took 10 of the Turkish tablets, assuming they were not as strong as their European equivalent. He had fallen asleep on Duval's sofa, but several hours later had stopped breathing. According to his mother, he was researching an organisation he believed was involved in running a paedophile ring. He had previously been addicted to heroin and crack and had claimed to have been a victim of a mind control programme run by Britain and the US in conjunction with surviving Nazis, including an attempt to create a "superman" warrior. At the inquest, a toxicologist said Spiers had levels of Xanax in his system at twice the therapeutic dose. A post mortem exam also discovered levels of oxycodone, an opioid, at a "potentially fatal" level. There was also "a rather widespread pneumonia". Conspiracy theories about his death had developed following the failure of the Polish police to examine Spiers's body or conduct an investigation. *Times, Metro, Sun, 11 Aug 2018; BBC News, Guardian, 7 Jan; D.Telegraph, 8+10 Jan 2019.*

Tree surgeon James Ogilvie, in his 50s, was on a night out in Kirkcaldy, Fife, on 14 December when he noticed the lights on the town's Christmas tree were hanging incorrectly. He tried to fix them, but fell 20ft (6m) to his death. *Sun, 15+18 Dec 2018.*



Tallmadge Wakeman D'Elia, a 38-year-old TV producer from St Petersburg, Florida, was killed last May when a vape pen exploded and shot pieces of the device into his skull. He had burns on roughly 80 per cent of his body and there was "extensive" damage to the bedroom where his body was discovered. A piece removed from his head featured the logo of Smok-E Mountain Mech Works, a company that makes a powerful type of vape pen called a mechanical mod. An online description of one of its products warns that they have "no safety features" and "no regulations".

E-cigarette explosions are rare. In 2016 one vape user suffered third-degree burns when his pen exploded in his pocket, and in 2017 an Idaho man lost nine teeth after his device blew up in his mouth. *<i> 18 May 2018.*

Prosecutors in the United Arab Emirates have accused a Moroccan woman of killing her boyfriend of seven years, then cooking his body before serving it with rice to Pakistani workers as 'machboos', a Gulf recipe similar to biriyani. Police in Al-Ain said the murder happened because the boyfriend had planned to marry someone else. His death was discovered after his brother reported him missing and his tooth was found in a blender in the woman's kitchen. *dailyrecord.co.uk, 20 Nov; D.Telegraph, 21 Nov 2018.*

Carly Ann Harris, 38, believed she had to kill her daughter Amelia to save the world. On 8 June she drowned the four-year-old girl in the bath, wrapped her body in a sheet and set fire to it on a coffee table in the garden of her house in Trellaw, South Wales. Neighbour Megan Griffiths saw Harris in the garden looking dazed. "God will be with her," said Harris. "The angels have taken her." When the police arrived, Harris said: "The angels told me to do it. Just arrest me. It's OK." Amelia's 17-year-old brother said Harris had "not been well" for six weeks prior to the incident and would stare out of a back window saying people were "stalking" them. *(Queensland) Sunday Mail, 16 Dec; Metro, 18 Dec 2018.*

A swimmer died of a heart attack when a stingray stung him. The 42-year-old man, swimming close to shore off Lauderdale Beach in Tasmania, went into cardiac arrest on 17 November after suffering a puncture wound to his lower abdomen. Friends pulled him from the water but failed to resuscitate him. *Adelaide Advertiser, 19 Nov 2018.*

Home Study Course Started A 20-Year Writing Career



Heather Burnside took a home study Creative Writing Course with The Writers Bureau in 1999. 20 years on Heather is still writing and has recently signed another three-book deal with *Aria Fiction* at *Head of Zeus*.

Can creative writing really be taught? Manchester based author, Heather Burnside, is proof that it can. She says, "the skills I gained on The Writers Bureau's course have been invaluable. During my studies I learnt writing techniques that have stood me in good stead as an author and copywriter. It gave me the knowledge and confidence to pursue writing as a career."

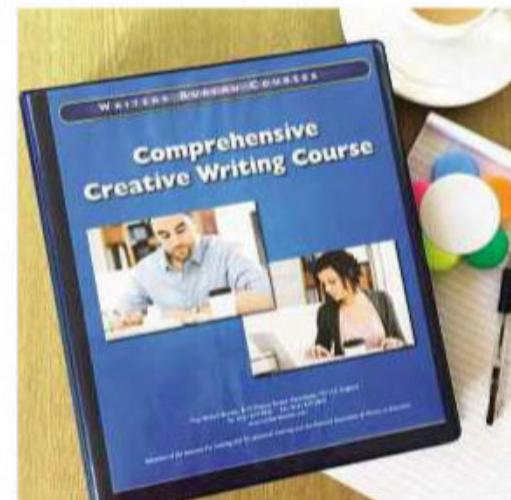
The course is very practical and students are encouraged to submit work to publications as soon as their tutor feels they are ready. This means students can start earning from their writing very quickly. The Writers Bureau take this side of the course very seriously and even offer an amazing money back guarantee if students don't earn their fees back from published work by the end of their studies.

"The flip side to this is that I became inundated with work at various points in the course," explains Heather. "This is because, if you have an article accepted by a magazine then it makes sense to follow it up with another while your name is fresh in the editor's mind."

During the course Heather wrote the first three chapters of her book, *Nightclubbing*, drawing on her experiences of growing up on one of the toughest estates in Manchester. At the time she approached several publishers but no offers were forthcoming. Undaunted, she continued writing articles as well as setting up a writing services business offering proofreading and copywriting.



Even though she was enjoying her work, Heather's heart lay with writing a novel. So, after a while, she dusted off her original manuscript, reworked it, changed the title and her first gritty crime novel, *Slur*, was created. She independently published it on Amazon in 2014, shortly followed by two more books making up the *The Riverhill Trilogy*.



In 2016 Heather was signed to *Aria Fiction* at the *Head of Zeus*. They published her second set of books, *The Manchester Trilogy* as well as republishing *The Riverhill Trilogy*. She's just recently signed another three-book deal with them.

"I'm sure that without The Writers Bureau I would never have had the confidence to self-publish my first novel. They taught me valuable skills, which I put to good use every time I write. I am now lucky to be earning a living doing something I love, and it all started when I studied the Creative Writing Course."

For those wanting to explore creative writing as a career option then The Writers Bureau Comprehensive Writing Course is a good place to start. It covers all types of writing from articles to short stories, novels to scripts so people can discover what they're good at and where their passions lie. Information is free and you can enrol on a 15-day trial to make sure the course is for you. Visit their website or call them today! You never know where it will take you.

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